

AA0003675311



UCSB LIBRARY: REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

Guthrum the Dane
by
Robert Story.



THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES



GUTHRUM THE DANE;

A TALE OF

THE HEPTARCHY.

BY

ROBERT STORY.

LONDON:

LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, & LONGMANS,

PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1852.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY J. DAVY AND SONS, 137, LONG ACRE.

178
5-109
5887g

TO
MISS REANEY
OF BRADFORD
(IN THE COUNTY OF YORK)

This Poem
IS PROUDLY AND GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED
BY THE AUTHOR.

775460

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

Soul of the Last and Mightiest
Of all the Minstrels—be thou blest !
For that thou hast bequeathed to me
A great and glorious LEGACY,
Such as no other single mind—
Save SHAKSPEARE'S—ever left behind !
One, not of earth, or earth-born gold,
In acres broad, or sums untold,
Which may by heirs be wasted ; may,
By lawless force, be swept away ;
Or meanly filched by legal stealth ;
But a bequest of mental wealth !
Left not to me alone, although
As much my own as if 'twere so ;
And yet, high thanks to art divine !
As much the world's, as it is mine ;
E'en like the air, or like the sun,
Enjoyed by all, engrossed by none ;
Diffused, unspent ; entire, though shared ;
And undiminished, unimpaired ;

Ordained to rouse emotions high,
And charm—till England's language die !

Oh, when at first I saw the Tale
Which tells of the redoubted Gael,
And of the Bard whose larp would wake
To soothe the Lady of the Lake,
I did not *read*. That term were weak
The process of the hour to speak :
Page after page, thy words of flame
To me—without a medium—came !
The instant glanced at, glanced the whole
Not on my *sight*, but on my *soul* !
And, thus daguerreotyped, each line
Will there remain while life is mine !
I deemed that lay the sweetest far
That ever sung of love and war ;
And vowed that, ere my dying day,
I would attempt such lovely lay.
But I was young, and had forgot
How different were from thine, O SCOTT !
My genius, and my earthly lot.

What though my ear, in boyhood's time,
 Delighted, drank the flowing rhyme ?
 Though then, like POPE, no fool to fame,
 " I lisped in numbers," for they came,
 And waked, uncensured, unapproved,
 An echo of the strain I loved ?
 And what though, in maturer days,
 With none to judge, and few to praise,
 Survived and ruled the impulse strong,
 And my heart lived and moved in song ?
 Still—poor, unfriended, and untaught,
 A Cyclops in my Cave of Thought,
 Long sought I round, ere glimpse of day
 Consoled me with its entering ray.
 At length it came ! and then I tried
 To wake my Harp in lonely pride.

My Harp was made from stunted tree,
 The growth of Glendale's barest lea ;
 Yet fresh as prouder stems it grew,
 And drank, with leaf as green, the dew ;
 Bright showers, from Till or Bowmont shed,
 Its roots with needful moisture fed ;

Gay birds, Northumbrian skies that wing,
 Amid its branches loved to sing ;
 And purple Cheviot's breezy air
 Kept up a life-like quivering there.
 From Harp, thence rudely framed and strung,
 Ah ! how should strain like thine be flung ?
 If moved by Hope's ambitious dream,
 I struck it to some lofty theme,
 All harshly jarred its tortured chords,
 As 'plaining such should be its lord's ;
 But all its sweetness wakened still
 To lay of Northern stream or hill !

To CRAVEN's emerald dales transferred,
 That simple Harp with praise was heard.
 The manliest sons, the loveliest daughters,
 That flourish by the Aire's young waters,
 By gentle Ribble's verdant side,
 And by the Wharfe's impetuous tide,
 Lauded its strains. And for this cause,
 While throbs my breast to kind applause—
 Nay, when, beneath the turf laid low,
 No kind applause my breast can know—

A *Poet's blessing*, heart-bequeathed,
 O'er the domains of Craven breathed,
 Shall be to every hill and plain
 Like vernal dew, or summer rain,
 And stay with her, while bud or bell
 Decks lowland mead, or upland fell !

There—mindful still of thee—I strove
 To frame a lay of war and love.
 I roused old heroes from the urn ;
 Bade buried monks to day return ;
 And waked fair maids, whose dust had lain
 Ages in lead, to bloom again ;
 My grateful wish to pour along
 Those emerald dales the charm of song,
 And do for Malham's Lake and Cave
 What thou hadst done for Katrine's wave.
 Not that the pride impelled me now
 That had inspired my youthful vow ;
 I would but some *like notes* essay,
 Not rashly wake a rival lay !

But years of gloom and strife came on ;
 Dark omens girt the British Throne ;
 The Disaffected and the Bad,
 Who hopes from wild commotion had,
 Gave towns to tumult and to flame,
 And treason wrought—in WILLIAM's name !
 That was no time, in idle lays,
 To kindle feuds of other days—
 I tuned my Harp to Order's cause,
 And sung for Britain's King and Laws !
 For party ? Ay ! but party *then*
 Was led by England's greatest men—
 By *Him*, to save his country born ;
 By *Him*, whom all the people mourn ;
 'Twas graced by STANLEY's noble name,
 And vaunted that of 'gallant GRAEME.'
 Men—far too high, too pure, too proud,
 To flatter either court or crowd ;
 Men—moved by patriotic zeal,
 And seeking nought but England's weal !
 Dull were the head could style the man
 Who followed *them*, a partisan.

Far from thy Tweed—my birth that claims—
 I find myself on regal THAMES !
 The swans that SPENSER loved to sing,
 Before me prune the snowy wing ;
 In Surrey woods, by moonlight pale,
 I list to THOMSON's nightingale ;
 Use the same walks that poet used,
 And muse, where POPE himself hath mused !
 What wonder if the wish, that burned
 So strong in youth, in age returned ;
 And—'mid such scenes—my Harp again
 Took up the long-abandoned strain ?
 But ah ! when of the high design
 Is traced at length the closing line,
 I say not—How unlike to thine !
 The forward child of youthful pride,
 That bold Presumption long hath died—
 But—How unlike to that which first
 On my enraptured Fancy burst,
 When, fresh and fair, my untried theme
 Rose—like a landscape in a dream !
 That landscape hath familiar grown,
 And half of its romance is flown.

Thus regions new, in distance seen,
 Have sunny vales of smoothest green,
 And mountains which, as they ascend,
 With the blue sky so softly blend,
 That—giving nought of *earth* to view—
 They seem to be ethereal too !
 But, visited, the change is harsh ;
 The vales that looked so smooth, are marsh ;
 Brushwood and heath the hills array ;
 And rock and quagmire bar the way !
 — Yet round that marsh, who seek the vale,
 May violet find, or primrose pale ;
 Yet on those hills, who choose to climb,
 May meet the crow-flower or the thyme ;
 While e'en the rock for flowers has room,
 And e'en the quagmire boasts its bloom !
 And, well I hope, that Northman ne'er
 Will lend a cold, fastidious ear,
 To hear a native Bard rehearse,
 In the good old heroic verse,
 How, bold of heart and strong of hand,
 His DANISH FATHERS WON NORTHUMBERLAND.

GUTHRUM THE DANE.

CANTO I.

“ I FEEL the sun ! ” the Aged Warrior said,
His hand upon his Grandchild’s shoulder laid—
A Stripling tall, whose locks of yellow shone
In bright and beauteous contrast to his own,
Which waved, amid that summer morning’s glow,
As purely white as Cheviot’s drifted snow !
“ I feel the sun ! ” again the Warrior said,
“ So, rest we, Harold, on this mountain’s head,
Whence thou—not I !—may’st cast thine eyes abroad,
And see the beauty of the works of GOD—

•

His Mountains wild, and his yet wilder Sea,
Which lieth in its might so tranquilly,
And wooeth with so soft a kiss the shore,
As if it promised to be wild no more !
Look to the right—Thou see'st the castled steep
Of regal Bamborough beetle c'er the deep ;
See'st, far beneath, the sparkling waters play,
As wins the tide on Waren's beauteous bay ;
And on the left, the Tower of Holy Isle
Rise, like a rock of snow, in Morning's smile !

'Twas thus that rose the land, thus gleamed the wave,
'Twas thus that shone the sun, when Guthrum brave,
GUTHRUM THE DANE, from whom, with pride and joy,
For ever trace thy princely line, my Boy !
When Guthrum led his Danish fleet, well-manned,
And anchored all his ships on yonder strand.
'Tis long ago. Men then, my son, were men !
I was not blind, I was not feeble, then !
Wouldst hear the tale ?" Young Harold smiled. He knew
The threatened tale, but liked to hear it too ;
And had, besides, a generous wish to please
Much-talking Age in its infirmities.

He therefore answered with a prompt assent ;
When, gratified, his back the Warrior leant,
Beside the Youth, against a mossy stone
That cairned the mountain which they sat upon ;
And while, with cheek now slightly flushed, now pale,
And voice that often changed, he told his Tale,
There needed not the Harp. That warlike hand
Could once the sword, but ne'er the harp command ;
And therefore not like Minstrel, but like One
By whom bold deeds had often, erst, been done,
He, as he felt it, poured his varying theme,
And was the Bard he would have scorned to SEEM !

I.

A hundred ships, my son, with mast and sail,
Had caught the impulse of the eastern gale ;
In every ship, a score of rowers brave
Had backward bent their oars to brush the wave ;
When Guthrum's vessel gave the parting sign,
And led herself the way across the brine.
Carved rudely on her prow, her dragon's form
Had, scathless, weathered many a wreckful storm ;

For all along her sides, from stem to stern,
The mystic words might every eye discern,
Which held within their characters a charm,
Of power the wildest tempest to disarm!
Spell-guarded was her mast of roan-tree,
And eke her canvas—wove by Sisters Three,
Who, as their flying shuttles led the woof,
With magic songs had made it wizard-proof!
From the same hands, to Guthrum's safety true,
Had come the flag that at the mast-head flew,
On whose white fold there soared the Raven Black,
Empowered to scent the prey, and point the track—
At least, obedient to our Northern creed,
We boldly followed where he seemed to lead!

II.

The weapons used in war on deck were stored—
The lance, the bow, the battle-axe, the sword;
While, as the bearers tall, and framed of wood,
Lashed side by side, the shields around it stood—
Ever, in case of accident, at hand,
Our floats in water, as our guards on land.

Bright lay each steel-blade, bright each burnished hilt,
With Saxon blood so shortly to be gilt,
In no obscure encounter—since there came
Two Scalds with us, to give each fight to fame ;
Anlave and Rolfe their names, on Danish ground
For ready eloquence of song renowned.
Alas, to song no more they lend their breath,
But calmly slumber in the arms of death,
Their very names forgot, their strains divine
Erased from every memory but mine,
Which treasures parts of them—although it ought,
Perchance, to treasure things more worthy thought !

III.

We sailed from Denmark. Thenceforth, never more
Was eye of Aymund to behold that shore,
Which faded from my last and lingering look—
For with strange sadness leave of it I took !
Night fell, morn rose ; and still our onward way
We made through breaking mist and dashing spray.
Night fell, morn rose: and, as before, we found
The sky above us, and the sea around.

The third night came, and brought a timely blast,
Which sped our vessels forward. And, at last——

IV.

Through parting clouds of crimson and of gold,
Through flying mists of white, transparent fold,
Like some young Monarch from his curtained sleep,
Arose the Sun from out the shining Deep!
He glanced upon our fleet, and, glancing, showed
The spacious bay near which our vessels rode—
Here Bamborough Castle caught his earliest smile;
There caught it, too, the Tower of Holy Isle;
While the wild Cheviots—distant—to the ray,
As if less distant, reared their summits grey.
Fair and familiar sight! For oft, before,
Our ships had anchored on that goodly shore,
And oft had thence retraced the foaming flood
Laden with spoil—achieved by blows and blood!
And blood, we knew, was soon again to flow,
Spoil to be won, 'mid wailing and 'mid woe;
But that good fleet was destined ne'er again,
For Denmark's shore, to cross the bounding main!

V.

I sailed with Guthrum ; ever at his side
As kinsman owned, and as a warrior tried ;
To ask whose counsel he would often bend,
And whom he blushed not to proclaim his friend.
By my advice, a feint that morn was made—
As if we feared the shore we would invade,
Our fleet to seaward bore from Waren's bay,
Nor neared the Island till had waned the day.
Then, while the vesper bell in distance rung,
Our boats we lowered, and to shore we sprung—
A hundred men, selected from the fleet,
Inured each peril fearlessly to meet ;
Guthrum himself, with falchion in his hand,
The first to leap upon the Island-strand ;
Nor deem, of all the hundred warriors brave,
Thy grandsire was the last to quit the wave !

VI.

We sought the Convent—not, be sure, that we
Would in its shade do rite of piety !

For we were Danes, that held the Northern Faith,
And deemed that wreaking every structure scathe,
Whate'er its name, in which were wont convene
The hated followers of the Nazarene,
At any risk, against uncounted odds,
Was for the honour of our country's gods.
Instructed thus from infancy to feel,
Each had the stimulant of fiery zeal,
Which nerved his arm, and gave, amid the fight,
To deeds of blackest dye the hue of right.
Yet nathless, son, the firm belief is mine,
Had they not been aware how rich the shrine
Of good St. Aidan of the Holy Isle,
The pious Founder of the saered pile—
Their zeal would scarce have brought our warriors o'er
To bootless battle on the Saxon shore!

VII.

Full gloomily against the western skies,
Still faintly tinged with sunset's lingering dyes,
The Convent rose. Within, we heard a crowd
Of devotees at worship, low, or loud.

Our savage war-cry, and our weapon-clash,
Our in-burst—sudden as the lightning's flash,
And far more startling—checked the course at once
Of the low mutter, and the loud response,
And dread, well-founded, of a fierce assault
Sent shrieks, instead, along each echoing vault.
The bald and black-robed brothers of the Rood,
With little dignity, in haste made good
Their present safety—all escaped but one,
And he stood up beside the altar stone,
Defiant, calm. He, doubtless, wished to claim
The envied glory of a Martyr's name,
And had his wish ! To no man need I tell
What happed where Guthrum's deadly falchion fell !
We saw the fresh blood dim its azure shine ;
We saw his victor hand upon the shrine ;
And dreamed but of dividing soon the spoil,
Obtained at little risk, with little toil :
When men—not in the black array of monk—
Men—who had, at our entrance, backward slunk,
So seemed it, to the aisle's obscure recess—
Returned to light with looks of haughtiness,

And all so fully armed, as well, I ween,
To vindicate the proud change of their mien!
A chosen band they were of Saxons stern,
As, at deep cost, 'twas shortly ours to learn,
Sent thither by their Chief on duty hard—
The precious treasures of the House to guard.

VIII.

And now, my son, I wot thy youthful ear
Is keenly bent a Tale of Blood to hear.
And I—who lately heaved a sigh, to know
We sat with scenes so beautiful below,
And all those beauteous scenes of land and sea,
One mournful, one unpeopled blank to me—
I, by the very loss of sight, have more
Of power the scene, long vanished, to restore.
The Present now is nothing, Harold,—but,
Not so from me the busy Past is shut.
I miss, indeed, the common outward day,
But have, within my soul, a clearer ray,
In which, whate'er—in long departed years—
I saw, or acted, often re-appears,

And not, now, faint and dim—as when the shine
Of all the bright external world was mine—
But bold and brilliant, placed in real light,
And less, in truth, a *Memory* than a *Sight*!

IX.

'Tis thus, e'en now, I *see* that place of doom,
With its light fading till it ends in gloom.
I see the savage figures moving there,
As fiercely they emerge from gloom to glare—
Emerge in numbers more than matching those
To whom this evening finds, or makes, them foes.
I see th' astonished Danes; my gaze I turn
To where the lustres of the altar burn—
There, Guthrum, sternly poising his red brand,
To fierce encounter animates his band;
Points to the fresh stain, as an omen sure
Of that which every foe must soon endure;
And is himself the very first to give
The stroke, which no man can receive and live!
A shout—in which stern Valour's *heart* is heard—
Shakes the vast fane, as if by earthquake stirred;

An answering shout return the Saxon foes,
And the two lines in deadly conflict close !

X.

Few men, perhaps, there be, who will maintain
That bolder is the Saxon than the Dane ;
As few there are who will the converse hold,
And say the Dane is more than Saxon bold.
Once adverse races, on one soil they blend,
And, brave alike, no more in arms contend,
Except when, marshalled 'gainst a common foe,
They strive which first shall deal the victor blow.
'Tis plain, my son, when such in combat stand,
That *numbers* must the strife's event command.
Though Guthrum's falchion taught, at every wheel,
Some luckless foe the temper of its steel ;
And though his gallant band, with equal skill,
And equal prowess, worked his eager will ;
'Twas soon a certainty, that in the fray
The Danish force fell all too fast away.
As was my wont, I fought at Guthrum's side,
And marked his visage as our loss he eyed.

“ O’ermatched,” he said, “ and barred from all retreat,
No hope remains to us but from the fleet.
Go, signal them. No words, my friend—but fly ! ”
For thus to leave him, loath, be sure, was I.
Besides, an errand which I deemed so safe,
A youthful warrior’s mood might fairly chafe.
Reluctantly, with ill-dissembled wrath,
I went ; but found that not so safe the path
As I had deemed it. At the portal stood
Armed men to bar my exit—won with blood,
Theirs and my own !—I quickly reached the strand,
And gave the signal. Fast they leaped to land ;
And of our men, at least two hundred more
Soon stood, in arms, along the silent shore—
All glad to quit the ships, and drowsy sea,
All proud to rescue, or to die, with me !

XI.

We marched—but had not from the beach gone far,
When lo ! betwixt us and the western star,
A column of red light to heaven arose,
Lit, as it seemed to me, by Saxon foes,

A beacon on some neighbouring hill-top—meant
T' apprise the Mainland of our night-descent.
But as, with rapid steps, we onward came,
I soon perceived it was no beacon-flame,
But of some dread catastrophe the proof—
'Twas bursting, Harold, from the Convent's roof!
And ever, as our footsteps nearer drew,
The red flame brighter—broader—grander—grew,
Till, in its far-shed splendour, visible lay
The Isle, the shore, the vessels, and the bay!
I saw the huge Pile being thus consumed,
And inly said—"Is Guthrum there entombed?"
The thought was maddening! and at once I lost
Power o'er myself, forgot awhile my post,
And, acting most unlike a leader sage,
Ran forth—impelled by sorrow and by rage,
Ran forth, alone, with brimful heart and eye,
And burning to avenge him, or to die!

XII.

Again I hurried to the postern door,
Whence I had cut my way not long before.

The guards were gone ; but out a blast there broke,
Full in my face, of mingled fire and smoke !
'Twas with a sinking heart I backward drew ;
For I believed its dark foreboding true,
And that beneath the rapid flames had quailed
Alike the brave Assailants and th' Assailed !
And Guthrum—he—my generous Prince—my friend !
But could such hero thus have met his end ?
The doubt inspired a hope. With lightened mind,
I turned away, the Convent's front to find ;
And gaining that, with pleasure I perceived
My frantic error had been well retrieved.
I heard my followers, heard their measured tread,
Next moment, I was marching at their head ;
Another, and my voice the order gave
With me to enter—to avenge, or save !

XIII.

But scarcely had the order been addressed,
When—like a torrent between rocks compressed,
Which toils and struggles, for a time in vain,
Free course and outlet for its waves to gain—

Along the vaulted passage to the door
I saw the tide of conflict wildly pour;
Pour with the torrent's rage, the torrent's din,
Its motions reddened by the blaze within !
The Danes came first ; but, coming, backward stepped,
And still their pressing foe at sword-point kept,
And when at last they gained the outer space,
Formed, and still met them bravely, face to face,
Receding, but with step deliberate, slow,
And with strong arm returning blow for blow.
I saw my Guthrum, firm and undismayed,
Wielding, with scarce less might, his battle-blade,
And though with force diminished, cheering on
His men—when Hope itself was all but gone.
Brave heart ! he dreamed not of the strength at hand
That now made victors of his gallant band ;
For wearied, as they were, by lengthened fight,
And daunted by th' approach of unworn might,
It needed little but our onset-shout,
To put the Saxon remnant to the rout.
Scarcely pursued, the guardians fled apace,
And left the Danes the masters of a place

In which the Fire-Fiend held his burning throne,
And wielded there a power that dwarfed our own !

XIV.

Guthrum approached me now, with sheathèd brand,
Expressed a warrior's thanks, and grasped my hand ;
And scarce his gratitude had ceased to speak,
When all were startled by a piercing shriek ;
But whence it came we knew not. One averred
It was some suffocating wretch we heard,
Who, left upon the bloody floor to die,
Had given his death-pang utterance in that cry !
Surmised another that, in sorrow drowned,
The Fathers walked the burning walls around,
And one of them might, haply—in that brief
And fearful outburst—have expressed his grief.
But I had caught, with more experienced ear,
The source and meaning of that sound of fear.
I knew the voice was WOMAN'S ! And I knew,
If half that I had heard of monks was true,
To find within a Convent's hallowed wall
A lovely damosel, were marvel small.

But no light fancy, in that awful hour,
Held o'er my bosom e'en a moment's power ;
Nought but that innate instinct—life to save—
Which moves the basest, but commands the brave.
Along the portion yet unfired, I ran,
Ear bent to listen, eye awake to scan ;
But sight or sound of life, alas! was none,
Save one distracted Monk—and only one.

XV.

I found the Father in the open air,
Engaged in weeping, and, it seemed, in prayer ;
And more by gesture than by means of speech,
Him I contrived, at length, my quest to teach.
Wildered at first the old man's looks had been,
But soon they bore the marks of anguish keen,
As if some object, near and dear, within,
Were perishing through his, the Father's, sin !
He motioned—for it now was mine, in turn,
The old man's meaning by his signs to learn—
And straightway led me to a secret door,
By evergreens and shrubbery covered o'er.

He took my hand, and, darkly entering there,
We clombe what seemed a steep and spiral stair,
And when we had attained the highest round,
We paused, until a massive door he found.
That opened, from the cell a dim light broke,
Through the close air, and haze of searching smoke.
A single glance sufficed to prove the Monk
A faithful guide. Upon the cell-floor sunk,
A female form lay here, as if in death;
And there, without a movement or a breath,
Her cheek against the flashing lattice laid—
Half stood, and half reclined, another maid.
Like marble bust the latter leaned in light,
As still, as beauteous, and, in truth, as white!
To raise them both, and both at once to bear
Down the dark windings of the same steep stair,
And into the fresh breeze of night at length—
But little tasked my early manhood's strength.
To place them on the greensward, far away
From the flame's risk, and yet within its ray,
That the good Father might employ his skill
Sense to restore—was task more easy still.

O'er them I stood, and blessed the welcome blaze
That gave, by fits, the Rescued to my gaze !

XVI.

A Maiden born to rank of high degree,
Her costly garments showed the one to be ;
The other's neat simplicity of dress
Might her poor Follower's lowly state express.
When breathed on by the air, the latter soon
Recovered from her deep and death-like swoon ;
'Twas somewhat longer ere the Lady broke
The fetter of the trance, and slowly 'woke.
At length, my son, I saw returning life—
Scarce yet triumphant in the dubious strife—
Returning colour gradually shed
Through the cheek's whiteness—like the dawning's red
Gleaming through mist-wreaths! and I saw her eye
Fair open on me—like the azure sky
Of morning, when the Morning Star beams through—
The seeming spirit of the kindling blue !
Harold, that was a moment richly worth
All the best moments I had passed on earth !

There are who tell us that true love requires
Time and sweet intercourse to fan its fires;
Then Love, my son, was not my Passion's name,
Which, in an instant, blazed from spark to flame!
That eye—I felt—that heavenly eye to me
Thenceforth my Blessing or my Blight must be!
The lovely Beam which—to my ocean given—
To wreck must lure me, or must light to heaven!

XVII.

From such emotions, new to me and strange,
I found my spirit lapse with sudden change.
As life in her resumed its wonted sway,
It ebbed from me—or seemed to ebb—away.
My wound, unfelt while yet my blood was hot,
And since, if felt at all, regarded not,
Had from the very moment it was ta'en,
Been stealing life with slow, but ceaseless, drain.
And now my head grew light; I fell to ground;
The sky, with all its rushing stars, went round,
And whirled to utter darkness! As I sunk,
I had some glimpses of the black-robed Monk,

And eke a vague impression of a new
And numerous force of enemies in view.
The last remembered sounds my ear conveyed,
Were those of onslaught furiously made.
Then seemed it me, that people gathered round,
Who softly touched, and raised me from the ground;
Gently they raised me, tenderly they bore
Away—away. I heard and felt no more.

END OF CANTO I.

GUTHRUM THE DANE.

CANTO II.

I.

By whom—or whither—I was borne away ;
How long devoid of consciousness I lay ;
And where I was, when feeling's light again
Came back into the chambers of my brain ;
Were mysteries ! and no living creature by,
Appeared to give to questioning reply.
Nathless, I did not feel abandoned all :
The light that glimmered through the lattice small,
Made me, by slow degrees indeed, aware
Of some one's rude, but not unkindly, care.
True, I was in a wretched hut ; I saw
The walls were built of turf, the roof was straw ;

And yet not comfortless its aspect seemed—
Piled on the hearth, a fire of branches gleamed;
And my low couch, of mountain heather made,
Was softly strown, and had been freshly laid;
While various skins, with all their shaggy hair,
Spread o'er it, fenced me from each blast of air.
The garb that I had worn was near me flung;
The sword that I had wielded, safely hung;
My wound, too, as I shortly after found,
By skilful leech-craft had been dressed and bound.
And all were tokens that appeared to show
I was, at least, not treated like a foe.

II.

But where then was I? Was I bound or free?
I started from my lowly couch to see.
A thoughtless act! which scarce allowed me time
To gaze on mountains, wild, and white with rime,
And on a frost-fog, which was curling then
Up to the brilliant sunshine from the glen—
For Spring, although arrived, was timid still,
And scared by Winter from his yet-claimed hill.

Of that wild scene brief glimpse did I obtain,
When darkness fell once more upon my brain ;
And in this second trance, if minutes flew,
If hours, or days, went by—I nothing knew.
I woke again, awoke all faint and weak,
Dreaming I heard soft voices near me speak !
I listened ; gently oped the hut's sole door ;
And a sweet Vision graced the sunny floor.

III.

Before me stood a Maiden, young and fair,
With bright-black eyes, and eke with bright-black hair ;
With cheeks that bore the heath-bell's softest tint ;
And lips where Love might purest kiss imprint !
Her graceful figure—neither low nor tall—
Was something slender, yet was full withal.
Such ever may be seen, fresh, blooming, sweet,
When at the dance the village damsels meet ;
Such ever reap, in Harvest's merry tide,
The yellow fields that smile by fair Tweed-side !
But something sweeter in that Maiden's face
Than e'en its nameless charm and native grace,

I saw, and prized. It was the kind concern,
The doubtful, anxious glance, that sought to learn
Whether the change, which now in me appeared,
Was that she hoped for, or was that she feared.
From those sweet signs, I then, and rightly, guessed
This Maid had been the Watcher o'er my rest,
To whom, since that wild night of flame and strife,
I doubtless owed that I was still in life ;
And, deeply grateful for so kind a part,
I would have uttered what I felt at heart ;
But she, with finger pressed upon her lip,
Forbade me ; and away I saw her trip.
A shadow seemed on all things round to fall,
When she withdrew ; but light came back to all
With her return ! And soon the Maiden brought,
With smiles, the medicine which the Leech had sought
(As afterwards she often used to tell)
On moor and moss, by river and by fell—
A precious compound ! which, his science told,
Infused new blood, or purified the old.

IV.

New blood—at least new strength—there daily came,
By felt degrees, into my languid frame ;
But well I weened the strength or blood, conveyed,
Less from the Medicine came, than from the Maid,
From whose bright aspect and demeanour kind,
A light began to dawn upon my mind—
A light by which my fancy had full scope
To frame the visions ever dear to Hope !
That evening's strange adventures I recalled,
When, more than foemen, had the flames appalled,
The fight—the rescue—and at last the gaze
On those fair features brightened by the blaze—
Until the moment when on earth I sunk,
Exhausted, down beside the black-robed Monk.
If (thus I tried to reason) I had been,
By my own friends, borne senseless from the scene,
They would have, doubtless, borne me to the strand,
Nor left their Leader on a hostile land—
I should not in a wretched hut have lain,
But in my vessel, and upon the main.

Or if—provoked by holy treasure lost—
Guthrum had inland led his Danish host,
And brought me with him,—would my Guthrum not,
Ere this, have visited his kinsman's cot?
'Twas mystery all!—I then recalled the sight
Of the fresh warriors that renewed the fight:
Those warriors must have Saxon been, and who
Can prove to me they were not victors too?
But if they were, then whence—I fain would know—
Sprung all this care of me, their deadly foe?
Delicious, but O most presumptuous thought!
Had that fair Lady's intercession wrought
In my behalf? And do I—can I err?
This was the Maiden I had saved with Her!

V.

Impatience all, the truth to ascertain,
I would have tried my power of speech again,
But, as before, the Maiden's finger-tip,
Imposing silence, pressed her rosy lip.
My Danish ire was roused. The Maid perceived
The angry feeling, and, I saw, was grieved.

She gently pressed my hand, she did not speak,
Save by a tear that trickled down her cheek !
On this, my heart my conduct 'gan upbraid—
“Wretch ! this poor girl may be a Saxon Maid,
And if she is of Saxon lineage sprung,
How should she comprehend thy Danish tongue ?”
I begged the Maid's forgiveness with mine eye,
And the sweet girl forgave me—with a sigh !

VI.

I smiled—and yet was deeply vexed—to think
No power I had to seize a single link
Of that chain, whose unwinding was to guide
My future steps to ruin, or a bride,
Unless my young attendant first could teach
Her invalid the use of Saxon speech,
Or I initiate that attendant young
Into the mysteries of the Danish tongue ;
And either, Harold, seemed to me a feat
Less easy than an armèd host to meet.
Judge then my wonder, and conceive my joy,
To hear the Maiden Danish terms employ !

Imperfect, it is true, but Oh, how dear
The unexpected accents to mine ear!

VII.

“ The Leech’s charge was strict,” the Maiden said,
“ That I should keep thee quiet, and in bed,
From aught that might awake emotion deep,
In one whose only need is rest and sleep.
And I, obedient to his uttered will,
Have kept thee so, and so would keep thee still.
But thou didst save me! thine the daring hand
That from the very burning plucked the brand!
And God, who died for us upon the tree,
(The Maiden crossed herself) my witness be!
I would do aught, so that it harm thee not,
Do aught to soothe or cheer thy hapless lot!
Assured that, do for thee whate’er I may,
I never can that gallant deed repay.

VIII.

“ To tell, e’en now, in thine impatient ear,
The narrative that thou wouldst gladly hear,

To me were task most sweet ! But of the tale
A part, at least, I've sworn from thee to veil ;
And thou, in turn, must pledge to me thy troth,
Never to tempt me from my taken oath."

" I will—I do—by WODEN ! I replied.

" Oh, thou art Pagan still," she said, and sighed.

" That Woden was, I know, my father's god,

Until upon our English soil he trod,

Where he imbibed the beautiful, the good,

The pure religion of the blessèd Rood."

" Thy sire was, then, a Danish man ? " I said.

" He was ; and I am half a Danish maid !

Like thee, my father crossed the bounding main,

In quest of glory, and, no doubt, of gain ;

But being taken in a skirmish, he

Was here detained in sad captivity—

To which, in lapse of time, grown reconciled,

He wedded, and you see his single child,

Who, certes, little thought, when oft she hung,

In playful girlhood, on her father's tongue,

That the few words her young attention caught,

Would ever serve a Danish Captive aught."

IX.

“ I am a Captive then ? ” “ Alas, thou art !
And bitter, truly, is the Captive’s part.
But touch not that forbidden theme ! Enough ;
At least thy gaoler is not stern or rough.”
“ Kind gaoler thou ! May not thy Captive claim
To know his young and lovely gaoler’s name ? ”
“ They call me Bertha,” quickly answered she ;
“ My father chose the name, and gave it me,
Because ’twas that his aged Mother bore,
Who pined away, for him, on Denmark’s shore.”
“ Then, dearest Bertha, not to touch thy vow,
Oh, tell me all thou canst—and tell it now ! ”
She seated her on dais my couch beside,
And kindly thus with my request complied :

X.

“ Ask not of me the rank, or e’en the name,
Of her you rescued from the Convent’s flame ;
Let it suffice thee, if I say, in brief,
She claims some kindred with the Earl or Chief,

Who, underneath King Alfred's high command,
Now rules the kingdom of NORTHUMBERLAND—
Important charge! which, stretching many a league,
Demands incessant action and fatigue.
Warriors the vigil and the march may bear,
But ill they suit the delicate and fair.
This felt the Earl, and often had he tried
A place of rest and safety to provide;
But, so, alas! it chanced, we came the while
Nigh to the Convent of the Holy Isle;
Which seemed to promise, with its ample guard,
A brief asylum for his lovely Ward.
He took us thither in a luckless hour;
He saw us placed in fair and fitting bower;
Time pressed; he had the Danish fleet perceived,
And that it made for Bamborough's shore, believed.
Hence in the Convent he short space remained;
The Monks scarce knew the gentle guest they gained;
One only learned the Lady's rank, and he
Was the good Abbot—whom I saw with thee.

XI.

“ The Chief of us had taken hasty leave ;
The Convent bell had tolled the hour of eve ;
The eve was slowly fading into night ;
And we sat, pensive, by our lonely light ;
When rose that mingled sound, whose import dread
Our conscious hearts at once interpreted—
For often had we listened to, ere then,
The fearful clangour of encountering men,
To which no ear hath ever listened yet,
That can mistake it, or that will forget !
High-born and proud, the Lady bent to hear
With more by far of wonder, than of fear ;
In undisguised alarm *I* held my breath,
And drank in every tone that told of death !
I’ve heard of men, on whom the watching snake
Had fixed a bright eye from the forest brake,
Who thereby have been drawn—allured—compelled—
T’ approach the object, though with dread beheld ;
E’en thus I felt me drawn, by mortal fear,
To look on that which scarce I bore to hear.

I saw—I hardly *gazed*, for what I saw,
With shriek on shriek, compelled me to withdraw!
A single light beside a column burned—
That, in my hasty flight, I overturned.
Nor paused to notice if the falling flame,
In its descent, extinct or not, became.
Alas! that oversight was error dire,
Which gave—who knows?—the Convent up to fire.

XII.

“ The Lady’s cell regained, what I had seen,
At once she read in my distracted mien;
And having lost all power of utterance, I,
By silent signs, implored her thence to fly.
But all my efforts were in vain, until
Thick, smouldering smoke began the place to fill;
When—all too late—to make escape we tried,
Descending stair, and threading passage wide.
O God! the passage into which we came,
Blazed fiercely with impenetrable flame!
Then sank at last the strength which seemed divine,
And left her spirit’s nerve as weak as mine.

Backward she rushed, her cell again to seek,
And spoke her terror in one long, loud shriek.
O! all to me is blank, that shriek between,
And my awakening on the Abbey Green."

XIII.

" But then—what followed then?" I wildly cried,
Mad with impatience. " Oh, be calm!" replied
The Maid, " or I must stop. The skilful Leech"—
" Oh, tell me not of him! Resume thy speech!"
" I marked thy sudden fall; I thought thee dead;
I saw the Abbot hold thy drooping head;
I heard the moan my gentle Lady gave,
As forth she faltered—' Save his life! Oh, save!' "
" Did she?" I inly cried, with bounding soul;
But on my tongue I kept a firm control.
" 'Twas then, among the band of Danish foes,
A sudden clamour and commotion rose;
A hasty battle-line I saw them form,
As if preparing for a coming storm;
And pressing, certes, soon appeared the need
Of all their preparation and their speed!

XIV.

“ I told thee, that at eve the Chief retired ;
By early night the Monast’ry was fired ;
The burning Monast’ry like beacon blazed ;
Through all its vales, the Mainland thus was raised ;
And mailèd warriors, as by signal’s light
Aroused, were marching through the silent night.
Meantime the Chief, by his Ward’s fate appalled,
Had, by the flames, been to the Isle recalled ;
And he it was, who, with a numerous train,
Had now arrived before the burning fane.
At once his martial band their weapons drew,
And on the Danes with headlong fury flew.
Tinged by the blaze, the struggling warriors then
To me seemed more like demons than like men !

XV.

“ Thy countrymen gave way. Forgive, if I
Confess the truth, that then, without a sigh,
I saw thy Danish friends, man after man,
O’ertaken and cut down, as forth they ran.

The Moon now rose above the silver sea,
And, all betwixt her broad, bright orb and me,
I saw dark figures—struggling—striking—urge
Pursuit and vengeance to the ocean's verge!
I heard—or deemed I heard—the plunge and moan
Of hapless men into the waters thrown,
And the exulting cry that came from those
Who had regained their ships in spite of foes!
Then all grew hushed. Each loosened sail, outspread,
Caught from the dying flames their faintest red,
Caught from the risen Moon her softest white—
And the fleet calmly sailed away in light!"—
"Then some, at least, survive the fatal day,"
I inly reasoned, "and my Guthrum may.
But why not signal give with voice, or hand,
And call fresh numbers to assist his band?
And wherefore sprung not these, uncalled, ashore,
To check the slaughter, if they could no more?
Doubtless, because the spoil for which they came,
All knew, had perished in the Convent's flame,
And nothing, now, remained for men to do,
Who fight for glory, but for booty too!"

XVI.

The Maid resumed: "Back came the victor Chief,
And, touching thee, to us put question brief.
The Lady's answer was so softly made,
I could but guess the meaning it conveyed,
By what thereto succeeded. As she spoke,
He from his shoulders stripped his martial cloak,
And four, the stoutest of his train, he told
To place thee softly in its ample fold,
And bear thee forth. It chanced that then a Dane,
Who in the skirmish had been Captive ta'en,
Was brought into his presence. Him he bade
Thy visage note. Downcast at first, and sad,
I saw the man extreme surprise evince
To recognise his dead, or dying PRINCE!—
For so the Captive styled thee. I perceived
The Chief was not, by that discovery, grieved;
But rather seemed it me, that, after this,
With more of energy and emphasis,
The Earl commanded his attendants there
To treat their noble charge with gentlest care,

And resting—when and where was need—an hour,
To bring thee safely to his Mountain Tower,
Where, placed in hut from noise and tumult free,
Bertha, he added, should attend on thee.
— My simple tale is done. Here thou hast lain,
For days and days, delirium in thy brain!
But thanks to Holy Mary, mother mild,
Who hath, in answer to her asking child,
Restored to thee, in part at least, thy health—
A blissful change! to Bertha more than wealth!”

XVII.

The kindly Maiden, pausing, dropped a tear;
And if, in then returning thanks sincere,
My harder eye was wet,—thou mayst believe,
I did not, Harold, therefore blush or grieve!
“Am I, then, near the Chieftain’s mountain-hold?”
“Thou art,” she answered, “and I might have told
That scarcely ever passed a day, but he
Or came himself, or sent, to hear of thee,
Till called away by other cares, which still
Detain his footsteps from this Northern hill.

And She thou lovest—pr'ythee, do not start!
The humble Bertha knows thy inmost heart;
Its throbs she heard, its every thought she read,
When daily watching by thy fevered bed;
And soothly knows she, but none else will tell,
Thou lovest her!——I would that half so well
Some one loved Bertha!“(This the simple Maid
Said playfully, yet somewhat sadly said)—
“She too hath often come, hath watched with me,
And, wondering, listened to thy reverie,
But little understood it.” “Then,” I said,
“Those visits kind may still, perchance, be paid,
And how to her shall I my mind make known,
Who can no language speak, except my own?
I have it! Bertha shall my Teacher be;
The Saxon language I will learn from thee;
And if it give to every tone of mine
But half the magic which it gains from thine,
Bertha! who knows, but I in time may woo
A Saxon Maiden, and may win her too,
As did thy sire?” The blushing Maid's reply
To this was prefaced with a deeper sigh;

But instantly, as by an effort, she
Resumed her wonted, native gaiety.

XVIII.

“If thou art apt,” she archly said, “my skill
Shall quickly find thee words to use at will;
For well and sooth our Saxon proverbs teach—
‘Women have never any lack of speech.’
Besides, I’ve often heard my father tell
That the far country where, it seems, you dwell,
Is neighbour to—if it be not the same
As that from which, at first, the Saxons came.
And hence, he would go on, of many a word
The sense and sound, in both tongues, so accord,
That Dane or Saxon very soon may know
And speak, the kindred language of his foe.”
“Then, Bertha,” cried I, “we will that amend,
Since I shall learn it, not of foe, but friend!”

XIX.

I found it as the Maiden’s sire had said—
A common origin the tongues displayed;

Alike in both the trunk, the same the roots,
They varied only in the spreading shoots.
And such the Teacher's, such the Pupil's zeal,
Ere many suns were o'er us found to steal,
I had the pleasure, and received the praise,
Of mastering many a Saxon word and phrase.
Sweet teachings those! that lowly hut our home,
I seldom had a wish or thought to roam;
Though when my wound permitted me to stir,
I gladly walked along the hills with her,
And learned, by other sounds, or words, to name
Whate'er within our scope of vision came.

END OF CANTO II.



GUTHRUM THE DANE.

CANTO III.

I.

Spring was full Queen—her beautiful domain
Comprising mountain now, as well as plain.
—— Bertha and I stood on that green hill-side,
Where stood the cottage, one sweet morning tide,
And gazed with pleasure on a hundred hills—
The nearest green, and streaked with glittering rills;
The farther distant bleak, of wilder forms,
And trenched and furrowed by a thousand storms;
While One, that towered on high above the rest,
Had a deep gash upon its ample breast,
In which a wreath of lingering snow still shone—
The single relic of the winter gone!

Which seemed, in my desponding moods, to be
Left by its false, or happier friends—like me—
Conspicuous, lying there day after day,
And slowly wasting, in its place, away!
Fair were those hills, and still they looked sublime,
Although no longer in the garb of rime;
Fair were those glens, that deeply wound below,
Still white—but white with daisies, not with snow;
And fair those streams, that lay as smooth as glass,
Reflecting banks of broom, and hills of grass!

II.

“These Mountains wild,” began the Maiden, “claim,
Each for itself, a separate local name.
We stand on Lanton Hill. Not far behind
The verdant Howsden woos the summer wind.
That mountain, with its three wild peaks, before,
Is styled by dwellers near it, Newton Torr.
The oak-clad ridges, there, of Akeld swell,
And here, the bolder slopes of Yevering Bell.
While towering, yonder, with his patch of snow,
And proudly overlooking all below,

Is CHEVIOT's mighty self, his throne who fills—
Th' admitted Monarch of Northumbrian hills!
——Two streams, you see, one, winding still and clear,
The other hastening on its wild career,
As glad yon deep and sunless glen to miss—
The College that we call, the Bowmont this.
Beneath that clump of trees they meet, and then
Their mingled waters take the name of Glen—
A humble stream! which yet to pious fame
Is not without its pure and gentle claim.
For men relate, that when the Gospel-beam
Began at first across the land to stream,
A hundred Saxon converts, in one day,
Washed in its tide their crimson sins away;
While angel-bands, revealed to mortal sight,
From cloud and mountain watched the sacred rite!

III.

“ On Glen's fair bank stands Coupland's massive Tower—
Yonder you see its darksome turrets lower!
There makes the Chief, when in the North, his stay.
And mark you not yon modest structure grey?

It is an ancient 'Church.' Around it wave
Green yews on many a peasants lowly 'grave'—
So call we man's last resting-place, the still
And certain refuge from all earthly ill!
The graceful shrubs that—tall, and close, and rank—
Extend along the Bowmont's northern bank,
And gaily clothe it with their yellow bloom—
These graceful shrubs are, in our language, 'broom.'
And *this*—"The Maiden stooped, and hand and foot
Employed to pluck the wilding from the root—
"And this is 'mountain fern,' of which they say
It had high honour in the olden day.
Its root still bears the marks thereof, indeed,
But those our learnèd clerks alone can read.

IV.

"When the Redeemer deigned to visit earth,
And, though divine, to be of mortal birth,
Lowly and meek of heart, on foot he trod;
In all his blameless life, but *once* he rode.
And then no stately chariot marked his pride,
No pompous steed that Monarch might bestride;

The Ass—the all-despised—received for load,
That day, the Form of the INCARNATE GOD!
And He—the kind, the tender-bosomed One—
He—who inflicted pain or ill on none—
He—while the vast, adoring multitude
His peaceful way with peaceful palms bestrewed—
Rode humbly thus, and carried in his hand
A simple mountain fern, instead of wand!
The shoulders of the Creature, some discern,
Still bear the figure of the honoured fern,
As if He claimed, by that transmitted grace,
Our care and kindness for the patient race.
Alas the while! like many more of His,
That gentle claim by man neglected is!”

V.

Thus ran the Maiden on—describing still
Each object seen, or met with, on the hill,
And ever intermingling fancy meet,
Or legend, like her nature simply sweet.
“Bertha!” I cried, “thou art a kindly elf,
And framest all thy legends like thyself!

I would repay thee ; for I too full well
The native legends of my land could tell.
But most of them are of a nature stern—
Unlike thy story of the mountain fern.
In sooth, the meek god whom thy tale describes,
Would little suit our roving Northern tribes !
Almighty Woden, when on earth alive,
In glorious battle ever loved to strive ;
And still, high-seated in Valhalla, saves
The fullest cup for him who nobly braves
Death on the field of heroes, and who goes
Most deeply crimsoned with the blood of foes !
He, when the iron ranks of war we pierce,
Breathes into every breast his spirit fierce,
Till—filled with his divine, inspiring breath—
We mock at suffering, we exult in death,
And, proudly passing from the field of fame,
Join the IMMORTAL whence our valour came,
And, ever in the god's own presence there,
By turns the battle and the banquet share !
But—there no longer ranked with mortal men—
Our daily battles will be pastime then ;

Then will our nightly banquets have a zest
No earthly banquets ever yet possessed—
For we shall quaff from out Valhalla's horn
Mead-draughts immortal—pure as dews of morn !
Such glorious god, such future life, be mine !—
Yet, lovely Bertha, I would hear of thine.”

VI.

“ Alas,” said Bertha, “ very ill would be
The spell of God set forth, if done by me.
For spell indeed it is, a potent charm
All-ghastly Death of terror to disarm,
And change the Spectre to a Seraph bright
That opes to us the gates of Heaven and Light !
Yet it is simple too ; and since *you* ask,
To try to tell it will be pleasing task.
—But first, no god of wood or stone have we,
No Idol own, no local Deity.
He whom we worship, fills unbounded space ;
He fixed the stedfast Cheviots in their place ;
Streams, small or great, took currents from his hand ;
The winding Bowmont flowed at his command.

He made the Sun. Yon azure Sky above
Is the blue curtain woven by his love—
Spread o'er the world by day, and in the night
Besprinkled with his thousand stars of light.
He formed the Moon; and, what may seem to thee
A greater proof of power, he formed the SEA—
Which, though 'tis able to engulph in brine
Ten thousand fleets as numerous as thine,
Fills not the hollow of the Mighty Hand
That fixed its boundaries, and curved its strand !”

VII.

Then did she tell how MAN he made—in mind
Fair as the universe for him designed ;
And how man turned aside, and, in brief time,
Fell from his state of purity to crime ;
How blood—how kindred blood for vengeance cried,
And how with blood the very earth was dyed ;
Till God grew weary of a stubborn race
That lived to grieve his soul, and scorn his grace.
How then the world he drowned, but saved a few
By whom was peopled all the earth anew ;

And how the second race, still self-accursed,
Were soon as wicked as had been the first.
Again did kindred blood for vengeance cry,—
But there was **MERCY**, this time, in the sky !

VIII.

“ The Son of God,” she said, “ his only Son,
His Son Beloved, and with the Father **ONE**,
Came down into the guilty world, was born
Of **WOMAN**—(still on every Christmas morn
We celebrate that birth).—To men he showed
The way of life, the certain path to God.
The men he would have taught and saved, ingrate,
Returned him boundless scorn, and bitter hate ;
His pure and priceless gold accounted dross,
And seized, and nailed him to the felon’s Cross !
—Eclipse and earthquake, in his dying hour
Marked the sad triumph of the Evil Power ;
The sickening Sun beheld the tragic spot,
Beheld and trembled—madmen trembled *not* !

IX.

“ The Tomb received the Saviour’s relics cold,
The Tomb received them—but it could not hold !
On the third morn, before the day-light broke,
Self-animated, as from sleep, he woke !
Self-raised, he rose ! . He rose, as all the wise
Who place in him their trust, shall one day rise !
—Two women, who, before his death, had hung
Oft on the music of his heavenly tongue,
Sought, while it yet was dark, the Sacred Tomb,
Laden with spices rich, and sweet perfume,
His body to anoint. They came, they saw—
Not the dear corpse they sought, but, filled with awe,
Beheld, instead, two Angels, by the light
Of their own raiment, which was flowing white
And glistening—flowing over form and limb—
To which the whiteness of yon snow is dim !
‘ Wherefore seek ye,’ the shining Angels said,
‘ The Living here, where only dwell the Dead ?
Lo, HE is risen !’—In fear the women turned,
Trembling, away ; when He whose death they mourned,

Stood, as in life, before them ! living, stood,
Himself, a breathing form of flesh and blood !
——Nor but to them did he in life appear ;
He talked with others who had loved him here ;
Showed them how Heaven, by virtue of his death,
Was made, to man, accessible through Faith ;
And bade them bear the glorious tidings forth
To every quarter of the peopled earth ;
Then in their sight, and in the sunshine broad,
Rose to the clouds, and disappeared—to God !
—Woe to the PRINCE, however wide his sway,
Who hears the tidings, and then turns away !
Joy to the PEASANT, howsoe'er despised,
Who hears with faith, and is with faith baptised !
Such Peasant, dying, to a state shall mount,
Where thrones and sceptres are of no account !”

X.

With wonder, Harold, doubtless, thou hast heard
Poor Bertha's story almost word for word,
When she has long been turned to dust—as I,
Who now repeat it, very soon shall lie !

But the relation was so new to me,
So simply told, and yet so feelingly,
That—more than I to Bertha then confessed,
Or even cared to think—it touched my breast.
Hence every word, with every shade of tone
The Maiden gave it—as we talked alone
On that green mountain-side—is in my ear,
Distinct as on the day I stood to hear!
“Not very wrong,” I said, “the creed can be,
Sweet Bertha! since it is believed by thee;
And should it e’er be mine, the praise or blame
(But be it praise!) shall rest upon thy name;
And, trust me, I will come for baptism then,
To the pure waters of thy favourite Glen!”
I said it half in jest, and yet, ’tis odd,
Those very waters saw me given to God.

XI.

More might my tongue have said, but that I saw
A moving Form betwixt us and the haugh,
Now brightly vanishing by bush or tree,
Then shaming sunshine on the open lea!

“ Bertha ! ” I cried, “ do Angels *still* descend
From Heaven to Earth, to bless us and befriend ?
If so, there hither cometh, as I live,
The very Angel of thy narrative ! ”
“ O hush ! ” said Bertha, gravely. “ Such bold strain
In mouth of Christian were esteemed profane.
It is no Angel, but a Woman good,
That now hath issued from the oaken wood.
The gentle Lady of thy heart is near,
And simple Bertha claims no more thine ear ! ”
At the same time the Maiden sighed and smiled ;
Then added : “ In a place so lone and wild,
She seldom leaves the Tower without a guard,—
And lo ! I see them riding hitherward.
O’er yonder copse are flashing helm and plume,
And prancing steeds are bursting through the broom ! ”
The latter words on me were all but lost—
A nearer, fairer sight my eyes engrossed !

XII.

The moment often dreamed of when alone,
And often prayed for, was at length my own !

The Vision of my wildest dream stood there,
There stood th' Inspirer of my warmest prayer !
And I—who had, in hours of silent thought,
Befitting term and phrase not vainly sought,
To meet th' expected time—had trained my heart,
When it should come, to play no timid part—
And who had ever, in the front and van
Of conflict, borne me as becomes a man—
Now found my spirit, erst so high and proud,
In presence of that Lady changed and cowed !

XIII.

'Tis vain, my son ! I cannot half express
The charm of her imperial loveliness !
She had the look, the manner, and the mien,
The step and stature of a Virgin Queen !
She hardly seemed to walk, but rather glide—
'Twas the swan's motion on a gentle tide !
The summer wind was playing with her hair—
I've heard them say, my son, that *thine* is fair.
I doubt if on another human head
Tresses so beautiful were ever shed !

Did craftsman skilled the precious secret hold
To work with sunbeams, as he works with gold,
He might, perchance, collect, arrange, and twine
A gossamer-wreath that *so* would curl and shine!
Thus too, her perfect form, her faultless face,
A sculptor might have well essayed to trace ;
But then he could not have informed the whole,
And lighted up the countenance with Soul!
With Soul, that gave to lip, to cheek, to eye,
Each its expression, rich, or soft, or high,
To every glance and every movement grace,
To all a *power*—which is denied a place
In the mere living piece of soulless earth,
Whatever be its mould, its rank, its birth !

XIV.

I see her, Harold, on that mountain-side,
In all her virgin beauty's bloom and pride !
I see her, Harold, in the dearer light
Of many an after year, when—scarce less bright,
But somewhat softened, mellowed, by the lapse
Of time, and touched by passing grief, perhaps—

She shone in hours of sadness and of gloom,
Like Bertha's Angel in the Sacred Tomb !
Speaking to me of life, of hope, of cheer,
Of blissful worlds that never saw a tear !
Worlds ! into which—if true the Christian creed,
And if not true, 'twere very sad indeed—
She long hath passed ! Her high and queenly brow
Is crowned with fairer, brighter tresses now ;
And, hardly less than Seraph even here,
She *is* a Seraph—in a happier sphere !

XV.

She came. Her first look almost set at rest
The wild wave of commotion in my breast ;
Her first word—frank and destitute of art—
Completely re-assured my settling heart.
She named the peril I for her had braved ;
She thanked me for the life my arm had saved ;
And, lightly passing all I owed to her,
Entitled me her kind Deliverer.
She marked the deadly pallor of my cheek ;
She noticed that I still seemed faint and weak ;

And said she dreaded I should brook but ill
A lengthened journey over holt and hill.
For of such lengthened journey, she averred,
She had, alas! that very morning heard,
And the first chance, in gratitude, had sought,
To give me warning of the tidings brought.

XVI.

My countrymen, she said, with torch and brand,
Had ravaged all along the eastern strand ;
Had first laid waste the peaceful banks of Tyne,
Then made the billows of the Humber shine
With midnight fires. Thence marching, they had since
O'ercome, in arms, the bravest Saxon prince ;
And now advanced their high and daring claims
To hold e'en London, and its sea-way—Thames,
Where now their fleet was moored. Her kinsman Chief,
She added, zealous for the Land's relief,
Esteemed my presence with the royal host,
As what would serve the patriot cause the most ;
And had himself arrived, that morn, to bring
His valued Prisoner to the Saxon king.

XVII.

Conflicting thoughts the Lady's news inspired—
My friends' bold raid my mounting spirit fired ;
I heard the tale of battle far remote,
As charger lists to distant trumpet-note ;
My hand, instinctively, essayed to clasp
The trusty steel—which was not near my grasp ;
And with that bitter consciousness recurred
The truth, as bitter, of the Lady's word—
That I was in captivity, afar,
And scarcely fit—if near and free—for war !
Until th' announcement made to me that morn,
My fetters had been light, and lightly worn ;
Now, for the first time, painfully I felt
Close round my every limb their iron belt,
Thenceforth to gall me, and to gall the more,
That my brief, brilliant dream of love was o'er !
For final seemed the mandate I had heard,
And thence my lover's fears at once inferred,
That pass but some few minutes—few and fleet—
We, who had scarcely met, no more should meet !

From the sharp spur and torture of that thought,
A desperate energy my spirit caught,
Which made me overlook, it may be, slight
The wily arts employed by lover light
A gentle Maiden's gentle ear to please ;
But served my purpose, haply, more than these.
For genuine Passion breaks obstruction through,
And wins—where Prudence is afraid to woo !

XVIII.

Half kneeling on the sward, with upturned look,
Her fair hand—not withheld—in mine I took ;
She, slightly bending forward, seemed to hear
The words I spoke, with no reluctant ear.
“ Lady ! a chilling frost thy tidings bring,
That falls, and withers all my bosom's spring !
I gaze on thee ; but the sad time comes fast,
Nay, it comes now, when I may gaze my last !
Then Oh ! forgive me, if I now reveal
The hope I cherished, and the pang I feel !
I love thee, Lady ! deeply, madly love !
And knew I any word that word above,

In deep or wild significance, its use
Would, in my passion find a fit excuse !
I love !—And hear me—I am of a line
That boasts a rank, it may be, high as thine ;
And though to-day a Captive, I may be,
By battle or by ransom, soon as free.
Oh, say—were ever that my fortune's chance—
Might I not hope to meet thy favouring glance ?
If too abrupt my earnest question fall,
Blame the ill-sorted time—not me—for all !
Blame time, or me ! but, fairest, bid me *hope*,
And I with more than fate will boldly cope—
With more than fate wage battle haught and high,
And for thee live, or more—will for thee die !”

XIX.

Deep, undissembled anguish thrilled my breast ;
Close to my burning lips her hand I pressed ;
Nor to withdraw it thence essayed she—nor
Appeared a frown upon her brow therefor.
A high and quick suffusion, rosy red,
O'er her fine countenance just came and fled—

Such passing tinge the mountain snow hath worn,
When clouds of crimson have been rife at morn !
“ Brave Dane, I will not,” she replied, “ affect
To feel displeasure, where I feel respect.
It is to thee I owe, that I have now
The power at once to feel it, and avow ;
And this is not a time, nor likes my heart,
To meet thy honest truth with needless art.
In turn forgive me then, if to thy suit
My ear is closed, and if my tongue is mute !
Though not indeed a prisoner like thee,
I am, in sober sooth, as little free.
My noble kinsman holds within his power
Disposal of my person and my dower.
I can but wed me as that kinsman wills,
Who thus my dying sire’s bequest fulfils ;
And rest assured, that with a Heathen Dane
To match his Ward, by him were deemed profane.
Hope then no more !—And yet, if thy fair aim,
Instead of worthless love, were worthy fame,
For thee there yet remains a noble part,
And one befitting well thy generous heart !”

XX.

“ Oh, name it not ! ” I cried. “ Deprived of thee,
Lady, no further part remains for me.
Go, ask the hapless wretch, convulsed with pain,
The rugged precipice to climb again,
Down which his madness, or perchance, his fate,
Has headlong hurled his unresisting weight.
Alas ! his trembling limbs—all feeble now—
Can ill retain their stance on ledge or bough.
The springing shoots, by which uninjured hand
Might, at the slightest risk, the top command,
Grow there all vainly, and but mock the eye
Of him—predestined at the base to die !
And even if my heart, in spite of all
Its bruise and its exhaustion from this fall,
Had yet enough of power, once more to climb
The precipice with hope and aim sublime,
Lady, how vain were e’en success ! when Thou—
The glorious Vision which above its brow
Shed there a splendour bright and pure—art gone,
And all to me is dull and blank, and lone !

No, Lady, no ! That light no more on high,
Nerveless and hopeless, I have but to die !”

XXI.

“ Die! Thou shalt live !” she said, “ and give me yet
To owe a deeper and a dearer debt !
My life is little ; but, Sir Dane, to save
A Nation’s life, were worthy of the brave !
Hear me. My Country bleeds at every pore ;
The deadly strife, alas ! seems all but o’er ;
Our ancient glories vanished, woe and shame
Are all that wait the Saxon power and name !
Gorged with our people is thy Raven Black—
It rests with thee, perhaps, to turn him back ;
It rests with thee to bid these inroads cease,
And leave our suffering Land its wonted peace.
Do this, and win thee honours, pure and proud !—
But wherefore cometh on thy brow a cloud ? ”

XXII.

She saw aright. My Danish spirit burned ;
The part assigned, indignantly it spurned ;

No longer there a kneeling suitor, I
Stood up, erect, and firmly made reply:
“ No, Lady, not for *thee!* not for thy *love!*
Though valued all earth’s wealth and fame above—
Though all earth’s wealth and fame, against it, weigh
As less than nothing—would I see the day,
When treacherous word or deed of mine turned back
To his own fields, my glorious Raven Black!
Strong let him soar, and high, till he survey
The Saxon Island as his own wide prey!
Strong let him soar, and high! or, feeble, sink!
But let no one who fears or loves me, think
That I the base, degenerate wretch can prove
Who gives his COUNTRY for his selfish LOVE!”

XXIII.

Some admiration, and no small amaze,
I saw, were blended in the Lady’s gaze,
As thus I spoke. “ Brave Dane!” at last she cried,
“ Couldst thou imagine that my words implied
Dishonour? Mine! who idolise the fame
That gilds the patriotic warrior’s name,

Nor lightly thine! I should most deeply grieve—
But here comes One who soon will undeceive
Thy mind on this." I turned me round to see—
A troop of armèd horsemen scoured the lea;
Up to our hill-side stance, like light, they flew,
Wheeled, and a living circle round us drew!

XXIV.

The young and graceful Leader of the troop
Reined up his steed beside our little group,—
To Bertha cast familiar smile, to me
A word or two of studied courtesy,
But to his lovely Ward such phrase sincere
As gentle brothers use to sister dear.
And, certes, Harold, as I gazed on both,
I could, it seemed to me, have ventured oath,
That nearer kindredship the parties claimed,
Than either Bertha or herself had named.
'Twas singular to see their aspects strike,
At the same time, so different and so like!
To see the lines of beauty in her face,
Become, produced in his, heroic grace,

And that sweet dignity of look and mien,
Which might, in her, have graced a youthful Queen,
Roughen in him, until it took the air
Of martial Leader, prompt to do and dare!
Moved by the semblance, though a haughty Dane,
I almost longed to join the Chieftain's train,
Take, at his side, a brother-warrior's name,
And link with his my future fate and fame.
Such inconsistency can Love awake!
My heart was with him for the loved One's sake.

XXV.

A moment's space some talk, apart, they had —
His look was earnest, and his tone was sad;
While from his lovely listener's raised eye-lid
The frequent tear-drop gathered, gleamed, and slid.
Meantime, two armed attendants came with speed,
One brought my arms, one led a saddled steed,
When I, by them accoutered soon, and horsed,
Sat ready for the ride by fate enforced.
Half round I turned me, as I sat on selle,
That I might say—at least might wave—farewell;

But she my glances sought, had disappeared!
And I, who now some treachery vaguely feared,
Was falling fast into a sullen mood—
When lo! poor Bertha at my stirrup stood.
It seemed as if my very soul she read,
For, speaking in the Danish tongue, she said:
“Droop not, nor dread! There is no need. Of those
Who lead thee forth, not all, be sure, are foes.
There ride to-day, along with them and thee,
Some who would perish, but to set thee free,
Were freedom wished. To this one sign attend—
The man who speaks thy language is a friend.
Farewell—farewell! and Oh, through life and death,
Thy guide and guard be He of Nazareth!”
E'en while she spoke, the line of march was made,
And swiftly forward moved the cavalcade.



GUTHRUM THE DANE.

CANTO IV.

I.

The breeze of that sweet Morn, which freshly fanned
The verdant bosom of the sun-bright land,
And blew away each lingering vapour-wreath
From lowland valley and from upland heath,
Bade, with like power, the gloomy thoughts depart
That had been darkly gathering round my heart!
My spirit, wakened by the gradual change
From landscape known, to landscape new and strange,
And ever varying—regained at length
Its native buoyancy, its native strength,
And rose, as it had ever done, to note
Each charm of scene, or near me or remote.

I marked the rude huts of the labouring poor,
That stood by sheltering crag, or fenceless moor;
And scarce less rude, but stronger, massier far,
The castles of the Chiefs who led in war.
But far apart those castles were, and few,
And seldom came those lowly huts in view.
While all the land between lay waste and wild,
Where—save lone Nature—nothing ever smiled!

II.

The savage wild-boar roused him from his lair;
Leaped from its grassy form the timid hare;
The deer just gazed and fled; the tawny fox
Showed his long brush, and vanished 'mid the rocks;
The bolder bison led his wild herd's van,
And, loudly bellowing, glared on horse and man,
While, mustering close behind him, every brute
Seemed bent our right of passage to dispute.
These passed—before us, as we onward rode,
Wild birds their various forms and plumage showed:
The long-winged heron left the lonely spring;
The raven soared away on sooty wing;

Providing for its young and clamorous brood,
The rook was busy in the ancient wood ;
The curlew sent his whistle wild and loud
Down from a clear blue sky without a cloud ;
And far above them all, in broad sun-light,
The royal eagle sped his arrowy flight.

III.

Whether intending thereby to confer
A mark of honour on his prisoner,
Or for my safer keeping—at his side
The Leader had arranged that I should ride.
We rode along in silence, till he saw
The sullen shadow from my brow withdraw,
When, taking of my altered humour heed,
He—as on rising ground we slackened speed—
Accosted me with courteous air and bland,
And, smiling, asked me how I liked the land?
I answered him that, Captive as I was,
For liking, I, in sooth, had little cause ;
But for the land, three words might give its state—
’Twas beautiful—’twas wild—’twas desolate.

IV.

“ It is so,” he replied;” “ and I, Sir Dane,
Should like to see it made the fair domain
Of man, and not of wild-beast. It is well
In Nature’s charge to leave the rugged fell—
To let her cherish there, e’en as she will,
The heath, the gorse, the fern and bramble still !
But pity ’tis, that ample vales like these,
Which skilful culture could transform with ease
To fertile fields, to meads, and pastures green,
Should lie, as now, a bleak and barren scene.
’Tis pity too, to see each streamlet here—
As liquid crystal brilliant, pure, and clear—
Winding its way through marsh, and bog, and fen,
Or wildly dashing down a savage glen.
How very different, were yon thorny brow
The fair seat of some peaceful Chieftain now,
Who with a firm, but still a friendly hand,
Might rule the happy tenants of his land !
How different too, if on this lovely spot
Rose the poor peasant’s neat and sheltered cot—

Himself employed in cheerful toil, his wife
At home preparing all that sweetens life,
And his hale offspring on the dasied lea,
Engaged in gambols held with noisy glee!
Would that such peasant everywhere I saw,
Protected by his country's equal law,
Rejoicing in his King's paternal care,
And faring—as a poor man ought to fare!
But I, Sir Dane, in talking thus, must seem
To thee, indulging in a waking dream."

V.

'Twas new indeed, I owned, to hear the fare
Of poor men counted worth a great man's care,
E'en in a passing word. The hard, the rough,
Dull boor might be of consequence enough,
In work a requisite, a want in war,
In all beside, beneath attention far—
I checked me, Harold; for, this strain to hear,
The Chieftain's look turned grave, if not severe.
"Stranger," he said, "I mourn, but marvel not,
To hear you lightly hold the rustic's lot.

A feeling that, which oftentimes finds way
With the unthinking heirs of earthly sway.
But I, Sir Dane, have lived among the poor,
Have been the inmate of the rudest boor,
Have shared his frugal meal, his temperate bowl,
Have watched the workings of his inmost soul,—
And thence have learned to understand his state,
And all his worth aright to estimate.
Take this for truth. The difference that may lie
Betwixt the humble classes and the high,
Consists far more in manner, and in art,
Than it doth in the Head, or in the Heart.
The peasant, happy in his station low,
Knows all that it concerns himself to know;
Has loyalty; has faith at least sincere;
Has dauntless heart, and conscience Oh how clear!
The sense of kindness in his breast is strong;
Strong is his love of right, his hate of wrong;
And, maugre all the hardships of his fate,
He bears a heart-felt reverence for the great;
Though, if a true confession must be made,
His heart-felt reverence oft is ill repaid!

I hold, the Monarch, who—amid his zeal
And well-planned efforts for the public weal—
O'erlooks his welfare, in that act alone
Shuns more than half the duties of his throne!
Oh, when thou shalt regain thy high command,
Look ever to the lowly of thy land;
For know—whate'er the thoughtless proud may say—
They form its very strength, its very stay!"

VI.

"Thou canst not mean an insult; but to me
Thy words, at this time, sound like mockery;
For how," I said, "regain my lost command?
My freedom—nay, my life—is in thy hand.
I wot not whither now with thee I wend;
Nor if, when it is reached, this journey's end
Shall hasten, or retard, my destined doom—
Unbar a prison, or uncloset a tomb!"
"Then, generous Dane," he cried, "most glad am I
To bid suspicion and foreboding fly.
This journey leads thee to a Monarch, who—
E'en in a foe—to valour gives its due.

KING ALFRED hath been told of thy brave feat
At Lindisfarne, and deems it just and meet
Such recompense for that brave feat to make,
As he can give thee, and as thou mayst take.
Look round. What think'st thou of THIS LAND for meed?
This land—the whole—from Humber to the Tweed?
You smile, Sir Dane. Not less the scheme is fixed!
All—vale and mountain—those fair streams betwixt,
The King makes over to thy Chief and thee,
To hold of him in equal sovereignty.”
“ By mighty Thor! ” I cried, “ a princely gift;
But tell me, if thou canst, the Donor's drift.
No monarch wise will his dominions part,
Without some motive prompting at the heart,
And gift less splendid would by far exceed
The value of a mere instinctive deed.
Unfold that motive, or at least unfold
The terms on which a Kingdom we may hold.”

VII.

“ Brave Dane, when I shall thee in presence bring,
There mayst thou learn the secret of the King,”

The Leader answered. " I can but surmise—
But deem the motive pure, the purpose wise.
The Monarch wishes peace, and, for its sake,
Would friends of foes, and of invaders, make;
Would place you, as an iron barrier, then,
Between him and your other countrymen;
Or join your martial people to his own,
As brothers banded round a common throne;
And, linked at once in polity and faith,
Defy the world in arms to do it scathe.
Such would appear the King's design, and he
Commits its conduct and success to thee.
For this he purposes that thou shalt wend—
Not as his Captive, but his trusted Friend—
To Guthrum's camp. The King, I hear, would spurn
A pledge, if offered it, for thy return,
Beyond thy own free word—in which his trust
Is stedfast, as I doubt it not, 'tis just."

VIII.

" King Alfred honours me," I said, " and I
Will not the royal confidence belie.

But that my mission can, or will, succeed ;
That Guthrum will adopt your Christian creed ;
Will to your King required allegiance give ;
Or stoop beneath your Saxon laws to live ;
(For that your sense I apprehend to be
Of the two terms of ' faith ' and ' polity ')
Is what I little hope,—and hope still less,
When, as I hear, unchecked and high success
Attends his arms. The Victor's towering soul
Accepts no part. It claims and grasps the whole.”
“ Then he may find,” the Leader sternly cried,
“ Sharp lesson taught to his o'erweening pride !
A stubborn soul the English Saxon hath,
Not very soon, or lightly, roused to wrath ;
But, once enkindled, your proud Chief may know,
It burns—till it consumes himself, or foe !
Believe me, were our youthful King to meet,
E'en in a hundred fields to come, defeat,—
There still would gather round him, near and far,
Fresh force to feed the patriotic war.
For never upon ENGLAND's soil, Sir Dane,
Shall foreign foot in quietude remain !—

Except it be by such agreement fair,
As thou art destined by the King to bear."

IX.

The long ascent, by this time, was passed o'er,
And level stretched, for miles, the land before.
Again, at signal given, to wonted speed
Each bending horseman spurred his willing steed.
We crossed the Coquet's blue and winding stream;
Next hour we saw the wooded Wansbeck gleam;
To miles of moor day lent its failing shine,
But ceased to light us ere we reached the Tyne,
Whose surface broad, as liquid silver bright,
Was softly rippling in the Moon's calm light.
The passage of the river soon made good,
We halted there beside a black pine-wood;
Turned loose our weary steeds to graze at will;
Sat down upon the margin of a rill,
To moisten thence our welcome crust of bread;
Then pulled the mountain heather for our bed.
And—laid a glorious summer Moon beneath—
Tell me what couch can vie with couch of heath?

His cloak his covering, and the wide blue sky,
With all its stars, his stately canopy,
Each hardy warrior proudly lay, and well!—
One only, waked and walked as sentinel.

X.

Sunk on his couch of heather, soft and deep,
The gallant Chief was not the last to sleep;
I, stretched beside him, wakeful vigil kept,
And would not—even if I could—have slept.
The offer fair of country and of sway,
Made in the Saxon Monarch's name that day,
Had, while it banished all my doubts and fears,
Revived my hopes. Years—long and brilliant years—
My fancy drew, of pomp, and power, and pride;
Nor failed with that loved One to grace my side,
Without whose presence, pomp, and pride, and power,
Were but the showy nothings of an hour!

XI.

As thus I mused, and wore the night away,
A lovely night that seemed a softer day,

A gentle touch my shoulder lightly stirred—
I looked; a face I saw, a voice I heard ;
The face—a man's—was closely o'er me hung,
The voice addressed me in my native tongue.
Strong was its whisper in my ear: “ Attend !
The man who speaks thy language is a friend.”
“ The very words of Bertha these !” “ Most true,
And therefore can they bode but well to you.
Wouldst thou escape ? Tell me—but under breath ;
The Chieftain lightly sleeps, and it were death
To me—found thus.” “ Escape !” I quickly said,
“ Ay ! gold to him who lends successful aid !
The wretch deserves a life-long slave to be,
Who will not, when he has the chance, be free !
But how ? I see no means ; and, Stranger, hark—
Thou find'st in me no mate for villain dark !
Hardly to win my freedom, would I shred
A single hair from off *his* manly head !”
He grasped my hand. “ Believe me, not to gain
His wished-for freedom even to a Dane,
Would Eric hurt him ! Rest thee—thou art free !
The time—the place—the means—entrust to me.”

He softly left my side, and on the ground,
As sentinel, resumed his moonlight round.

XII.

Unlooked-for freedom placed within my view,
Gave to my stream of thought a current new.
My long-lost friends to mingle with again ;
Once more my Guthrum to my breast to strain ;
And by some feat in future battle shown,
For past inaction something to atone ;
Would, of themselves, have powerful motives proved
To prompt me to escape. But others moved.
I saw a great advantage to be gained
To me, by liberty—if now obtained.
Admitting that in perfect faith was made
The royal offer through the Chief conveyed,
I doubted not, if free my course to trace,
I could with more effect and better grace,
Impress its prompt acceptance on my friend,
Than if as Captive I were forced to wend.
While with the Saxon King, no longer bound,
I then should treat on high and equal ground,

And thus obtain for Guthrum terms, perchance,
Fairer than he could win by sword and lance.
Or granting aught the hope of concord mar,
And that th' event, at last, be left to war,
My arm, my counsel, not to say my skill,
Would, in the strait supposed, be useful still ;
And I might conquer, not fair lands alone,
But a fair Bride—to grace my future throne !
Spite of such inward visions, sleep at last
My heavy eyes began to overcast ;
Which yet closed most unwillingly, and oft
Again would open on the moonlight soft,
And snowy garments see, and shapes divine,
Blend with the flashings of the streamy Tyne !

XIII.

The eastern beam, o'er vales of moorland borne,
Shed beauty on our march, resumed at morn.
We passed the valley of the Wear at noon ;
And couched, by Swale, again beneath the moon.
The third fair day was setting, calm and sheen,
When neared we CRAVEN'S pastoral mountains green ;

And gloom fell on us, as we slowly went
Down mighty Whernside's long and steep descent.
But 'twas a gloom that suddenly gave way
To the mild, soft, and unobtrusive ray,
Which now began, along the quiet dell,
To gleam on rocky peak and pinnacle !

XIV.

Behind the eastern mountain, huge and dim,
The Moon just showed to us her rising rim ;
By slow degrees the misty barrier cleared,
At length a circle, full and broad, she reared,
And, still ascending, upward calmly rolled
An orb yet beamless—as of dusky gold !
A moment more, and from her azure way
In ether, smiled she with unclouded ray,
Far down into the depth of that long dell
Which—overlooked by mountain and by fell—
Is watered by the Wharfe, whose murmuring flow
Was audible—not visible—below ;
For all along the winding dell, that night,
A waveless lake of summer mist lay white

In the calm moonshine—lay at rest, unstirred,
Save when a sudden gust of wind—scarce heard
To sigh from Arncliffe's wild and neighbouring glen—
Heaved its light-opening folds aside, and then
The rapid Wharfe, in momentary shine,
Led on his waters in a silver line !

XV.

High o'er the mist, in moonlight calm and clear,
Like some tall rock that juts on inland mere,
Hung Kilnsay Crag. The white and vapoury wreath
Half veiled the little hamlet placed beneath.
'Twas here I recognised a horseman fleet
Emerging from the mist our line to meet,
As Eric—whom my eye had tried in vain
All day, to find amid the warrior train,
But who, it seems, had ta'en of us the start.
The Leader hailed him, and they spoke apart.
Then, turning instant to the right, we rode
On ground, where horse's hoof had seldom trod !
Up wild and pathless mountain-sides we climbed ;
Down rugged steeps our cautious pace we timed ;

Now over quaking moss we lightly sped ;
Dismounting now, our weary steeds we led.
And thus we reached a copious mountain brook,
Which purely gushed from what appeared a nook
Formed by two meeting hills—a sheltered place,
Affording pasturage and ample space ;
But which—approached—threw wide its rocky jaws,
And by its gloomy grandeur made us pause !
Half cave, half chasm, it yawned !—Absorbed, I saw ;
And gazed in wonder, not unmixed with awe.

XVI.

Like the extensive area of some Tower
Which giants might have made their place of power,
But whence the hand of Rage, or Ruin, all
Had torn away of each interior wall,
And yet had spared the outward barriers still,
High, massive, rude, and indestructible—
Opening on my astonished glance, at first,
The rugged glooms of savage GORDALE burst !
In front, and on the right, abruptly sprung
The living rock, and—slanting forward—hung,

Extending from its deep and caverned base
A darksome shadow over half the space,
Till, far above our heads, it almost closed
With the gigantic rocks that stood opposed—
Leaving small space, through which the eye might view
The sky of night's bestarred and tender blue!
Beneath, the level floor was all bestrown
With numerous fragments, which the cliffs had thrown,
As slow decay, or lightning's sudden dint,
Through years disjoined them from the parent-flint.
With some alarm I gazed upon the proof
Of possible peril from the peaks aloof,
And looking round me to descry a place
Of greater safety, gained the gloomy base
Of that far-slanting rock, where—feeling free
From aught, except an Earthquake's jeopardy—
I stood and saw, with marvel ever new,
A scene yet wilder—stranger—given to view!

XVII.

Right, left, in front, still towered—all rudely piled—
The rocks in masses, rugged, high, and wild,

Formless, or cast in every varied form,
The mountain crag can take from time and storm !
And where they towered most rugged, wild, and high,
An orifice I saw, that showed the sky,
And poured—as if from out the sky itself—
A mighty torrent down the rocky shelf,
Which, being dashed from ledge to ledge, at last
Became the quiet brook we just had passed.
Descending 'mid the cavern's gloomy night,
The broad and broken fall of waters white
Resembled most a gush of moonshine clear,
Streamed through a thickly-clouded atmosphere—
The single intimation which is given
That there is then a lovely Moon in heaven !

XVIII.

Bound by the wild power of the scene, amazed
While Chief and follower stood, like me, and gazed,
I felt a sudden touch, and, turning round,
My self-announced Deliverer I found.
“ It is the time—it is the place,” he said,
“ Follow !” and quickly gliding forth, he fled.

I followed—followed unobserved—the man ;
Nor needest thou enquire if fast I ran.
Lingers the hare, with yelling hounds in view ?
Loiters the hart, when his swift foes pursue ?
'Tis but for life that these exert their pace,
And more than life depended on my race !
Led by the motions of my faithful guide,
My course was all along the streamlet's side,
Until into a gentle pool it fell,
Just at the entrance of a sylvan dell.

XIX.

There rose a little knoll, whose grassy base
The mountain hazel-shrub was seen to grace ;
And human eye that had not practised been,
Could, certes, there but hazel-shrub have seen,
But my friend, stooping, quickly tore aside
The tangled boughs, and showed an opening wide—
The entrance of an unsuspected Cave,
Which now to us its welcome refuge gave !
The lately parted boughs of hazel green,
Uniting fast, renewed their leafy screen.

Hard was the couch ; but, being safe and free,
That couch of mountain stone was soft to me.
The baffled troop—without—might search the rocks ;
The dogs might bay—when snugly earthed the fox !

END OF CANTO IV.

GUTHRUM THE DANE.

CANTO V.

I.

Reflected light, as if from water cast,
On the Cave's vault of stone was quivering fast,
And the fresh fall and flow of water near
Was murmuring and dashing in mine ear,
When I from sleep awoke, and, looking through
The screen of hazel, I beheld a view
Of sylvan sweetness. Morning's glorious beam
Was on the pool, and on the falling stream,
And, as the whitely-dashing spray it kissed,
Made shifting rainbows of the rising mist!
Each tree hung out its branches all unstirred
In the calm air; each branch sustained a bird,

That sat and sung; each green leaf in its curl
Held drops of dew—each drop a trembling pearl!
Tree, water, crag, in sunshine and in shade,
With the blue sky o'er all, a picture made,
Which, in the faithful glass of Memory set,
Is gay and green, is fresh and sparkling yet!

II.

Brief gaze I took; then turned to rouse my guide,
Who still lay fixed in slumber at my side.
A man he was, whose scanty locks of grey
Showed he had passed of life the middle day;
But whose black, piercing eye, and active frame
Advancing years had little 'vailed to tame.
I told him day appeared already high,
And asked him if it now was time to fly?
“Not yet,” the old man answered. “While we stay,
Here we are safe; for soothly I may say,
No mortal man, except with Satan's aid,
Can ever find the place where we are laid!
I knew the cave of old, and think 'tis styled,
By the few Dwellers round these mountains wild,

The CAVE OF GENNET, who, they used to tell,
A Fairy was, that loved the sylvan dell,
And haunted cave and stream—till put to flight
For ever by the beams of Gospel-light.
Such tales, be sure, have little weight with me ;
But when I learned thy wish was to be free,
I then at once bethought me of the place ;
And hoped if—aided by St. Mary's grace—
I could persuade the Chief, though but a day,
To quit the vale, and keep the mountain way,
I might contrive to lodge thee safely here,
Until thy pathway of escape were clear."

III.

" But how effect it ? " " Even thus : as scout,
Ere dawn of yestermorn was I sent out ;
At night I told the Chief, that then the Danes
In small detachments scoured the level plains.
An accidental fire, whose line of smoke
Far o'er the distant landscape faintly broke,
Gave timely colour to a specious tale
Framed to dissuade the Leader from the vale ;

And here thou art in Gennet's rocky cave."

"But this, my friend, thou didst at hazard grave?"

"Why, that is true. If taken by my lord,

A hasty shrift, a tree, and hempen cord

Were Eric's doom. But what may hap to me,

I feel as nothing—I have rescued thee!"

Moved by the old man's cunning and address,

But moved yet more by his devotedness,

"Tell me," I said, "whence springs the friendly zeal

Which for the safety of a man you feel,

Whose visage, but three summer days ago,

Thine eyes had, certes, never gazed upon."

"A man," he said, "who from the proverb learns

'One generous deed another justly earns,'

Finds that of force sufficient to enlist

His kindly efforts—where none else exist.

But wouldst thou closer into this enquire,

'Thou see'st in me a DANE, and BERTHA'S SIRE."

IV.

"Then," I exclaimed, "by all the mighty gods

That crowd Valhalla's ever-bright abodes,

I thank thee not ! but rather, while I live,
Must rue the liberty your efforts give !
Since it is purchased at the too high cost
Of thy poor daughter left—ay, left and lost !
Liefer would I rejoin thy Chieftain's train,
Liefer for life the Saxons' slave remain,
Than harm befel that Maid ! And *thou*—Oh, thou
Art that Maid's sire !—I almost hate thee now !”
“ That fault, if fault there be, thou mayst forgive.
Bertha is safe,” he said, “ and long will live,
Ere the young Chieftain, wise, and just, and mild,
Will for the guilty Father harm the Child !
Oh sir, the Chieftain is so good !—In me,
A man of simple, untaught mind you see ;
But when I have observed him near, and when
I have compared him with the herd of men—
He, as I said, so good, a soul of light,
At once with virtue and with wisdom bright,
They uninformed and savage, dark in mind,
More like to demons than to human-kind—
I've almost fancied him, at such a time,
A sinless native of a sinless clime,

For some mysterious end or purpose hurled
Down thence into a base and wrong-filled world!"

V.

"Who *is* the Chief, whose praises thus you press,
And whom, in truth, I value hardly less?"
I asked the question, but I vainly asked.
A moment's space he mused. At length, "I tasked
My brain, and risked my life," he gravely said,
"In thy escape to lend my humble aid—
Partly because I knew thou art a Dane,
But more, and chiefly, that, in yonder fane,
You snatched my Bertha from the flames away:
For this I *serve thee*, but not *him betray*!
And if you knowledge of the Chief would seek,
Eric, be sure, can neither hear nor speak.
Talk we on other theme. The time flies on,
I judge young HENGIST must be here anon."
"Young Hengist?" But it may, perhaps, offend
To ask who *he* is." "No—a faithful friend,
Bound to thy interest by as strong a tie
As warm and pure Affection can supply."

“What mean’st thou?” “This: my daughter Hengist loves,”

He answered. “Still his suit she disapproves.

But when of thy achieved escape from foes,

And of her lover’s part therein, she knows—

He hopes to win, denied to him erewhile,

His valued meed in her assenting smile.

Now I will tell thee all! On Bowmont Side,

While men, that morn, arrayed thee for the ride,

Bertha drew him and me apart. She told

To us the story of thy daring bold,

In a few hurried words; her fears confessed

For the dark future of thy fate; impressed

On us thy rescue, as a sacred thing,

Holier than duty or to Chief or King,—

But hark! he comes.” Just then a rustling made

By some one bursting through the hazel shade,

Announced the youthful friend of whom he spoke;

And Saxon Hengist on our converse broke.

VI.

About thine age, my son, and quite as tall,

But built more strongly, and yet light withal;

Of eye quick, sparkling, keen, and glossy blue ;
Of cheek that bore of health the freshest hue ;
Of hair that over all his shoulders broad
In fair and yellow clusters waved and flowed
Profusely ; Hengist was, in very truth,
A gay, a gallant, and a graceful Youth !
—Disposing on the Cavern's rugged floor
Of rural food an unexpected store,
Which he had purveyed, for the morn's regale,
From some lone cot in lovely Malhamdale,
He, while we sat at meat, to Eric old
His night-adventure with blunt humour told :
On missing me, th' indignant Chief, he said,
Had given command that instant search be made ;
That he, the Youth—to each suspected spot
The first to lead where I, he knew, was *not*—
Had managed to detach—unseen, unguessed—
The horses we had ridden, from the rest,
And stable them amid the greenwood glade ;
That he had couched him, till the cavalcade,
Diminished thus, he saw resume their march
As the first dawn-rays streaked the sky's blue arch ;

That he had followed, with his eye, their way ;
And only left them when, in brightening day,
They crossed the vale of Aire, and, gleaming on,
Began to vanish on the line of Colne.

VII.

The sense of freedom thus achieved at last,
Gave double relish to my plain repast.
We left the Cave, our saddled steeds bestrode,
And o'er the emerald dales of Craven rode.
But let me not delay my onward tale
By needless note of river or of dale.
Enough to say that, hurrying o'er the ground,
Impatient till the distant camp I found,
We scarce took needful rest. And Oh ! at length
We came where lay in sight the Danish strength !
“ Here SELWOOD FOREST stretches far and wide,
And there thy Danish friends,” old Eric cried,
“ Entrench them in their camp at ETHANDUN—
See ! their tents whiten in the setting sun !
And see ! aloft the pennons wave and shine
In the fair evening !—Canst distinguish thine ?”

VIII.

I looked, but natural emotion thrilled
My inmost soul, and joy mine eyes had filled.
Canvas and banner waved, and armour gleamed,
But blended all, and indistinct they seemed.
High o'er the rest, at length my clearing eyes
Beheld the tent of noble Guthrum rise,
Central and huge. Above it bravely shone
My country's flag, in many a battle known,
In whose white field appeared the Raven Black,
That soared—as if his prey he scorned to lack;
For of such stern resolve he seemed to speak
By outstretched pinion, and by open beak!
Nor, though his aim was foiled the following day,
Can it be said the Raven missed his prey:
To win Two Kingdoms—and this feat did he—
Was not discomfiture, but victory!

IX.

And certes, Harold, not of failure spoke
The sounds that then from out th' Encampment broke!

Sounds of carousal and of boisterous mirth,
That have in young and happy hearts their birth.
We reached the trench. The posted guards, amazed,
On me, as on a spirit, wildly gazed ;
But when my well-known battle-word I cried,
Their joyous recognition-shout replied.
That shout to us the nearest warriors drew :
They came, they saw ; they saw me, and they knew ;
And quickly thus, conveyed from man to man,
Throughout the crowded camp the tidings ran—
Exciting still, as on they passed within,
A wilder tumult, and a louder din !
O'er the rude planks that served them for a bridge,
And o'er the inner rampart's earthen ridge,
Some led our steeds to stall ; my friends some bore ;
While others cleared the crowded way before.
I, raised upon a shield, with shout and song,
To Guthrum's tent was proudly borne along !

X.

My Guthrum in the royal tent I found,
With all his bravest warriors seated round,

Passing from hand to hand th' accustomed horn,
Which each in turn must drain, and none might scorn !
For 'twas of ample depth, the juice to hold
Whose generous beverage bolder makes the bold.
O'erjoyed to see the warrior friend restored,
Whom he had long believed at Woden's board,
The King, arising from his seat, made sign
To change the mead for draughts of purple wine.
Thereafter hasty dais, by his command,
For me ascended at his own right hand ;
Eric, my rescuer, and himself a Dane,
For seat beside me waited not in vain ;
And youthful Hengist, though of Saxon race,
Received with us a like distinguished place.
Then rose the festal glee. Brave Guthrum called,
With joyous voice, for harper and for scald ;
And scald and harper quickly came. But ere
They string could waken, or could song prepare,
Had I, aside, to noble Guthrum told
'Twas mine important message to unfold,
Which—premature as yet for others' ear—
It deeply touched his interest to hear.

XI.

Retired apart, I told to Guthrum all
That had befall'n me since the Convent's fall ;
Of Bertha told him, and the noble dame
Whom I had chanced to rescue from the flame ;
As well as of the lore which—sprung from Heaven—
To my old faith a sudden shock had given.
I then detailed to him, in terms less brief,
My conversation with the Northern Chief ;
The kingly offer from his King conveyed ;
And my escape by Eric's friendly aid.
Loud Guthrum laughed. “ 'Tis very well ! ” he cried ;
“ So, thou wouldst barter for a Saxon bride
Thine ancient faith, and yet, forsooth, pretend
That true and deep conviction wrought that end !
Confess it ! from the Lady's eye was sent
By far the clearest, subtlest argument !
And tell me, Aymund, were not truth's demands
Pressed somewhat by the weight of Saxon lands ?
Well, thou art prudent ! ” Here his banter stayed ;
And grave became his manner, as he said :

XII.

“ Aymund ! I need not say, I am a man
Who have no time deep mysteries to scan.
I worship, like my warlike sires, therefor,
The honoured names of Woden and of Thor.
Though, to confess the truth, I hold the bark
That bears me bounding o’er the ocean dark—
I hold the covering shield and trusty brand
That make, and keep me, victor on the land—
I hold these sinewy arms, by which I wield
Alike the helm, the falchion, and the shield—
As my best gods ! nor do I care to sue
For help to Idols—be they old or new.
And did the changeful fate of war demand
That I must either quit this lovely land,
Or be immersed in water—stream or spring—
And rule a portion as a Christian King,—
Aymund, be sure my choice were quickly ta’en,
And all my fathers’ gods would frown in vain !

XIII.

“ But, not thus placed, it is my part, believe,
Conditions to *impose*, and not *receive*.
No power resides in England, save in me,
From rocky Cornwall to the Eastern Sea,
From Thames’s bank to Tweed’s. I rule alone.
E’en valiant Alfred quits his Saxon throne,
And lives—if yet the vanquished Monarch live—
A homeless Wanderer and a Fugitive,
And, doubtless, would be happy to regain
From me a portion of his wretched domain !
But since his present wretched plight stands thus,
Why, let the learnèd Monarch sue to *us* !
This night we give to joy—this night at least !”
He said, and led me back to song and feast.

XIV.

Three Minstrels swept the tuneful harp. That two
Of these were scalds of Danish race, I knew ;
And understood from Guthrum that the third
A Saxon was, who had with joy been heard

By all the camp—and certes, none the less
That half the sense the hearers could but guess,
Of each quaint legend, and each old-world lay,
With which he sought to wile the time away—
Much to the fretting of the native scald,
Who eagerly arose, as soon as called,
To wake the song. The foremost, Rolfe upsprung.
The sea-king's wild, adventurous life he sung,
Who never underneath a peaceful roof
Drains the full horn; but who, still terror-proof,
Enjoys the peril that he boldly braves,
And makes him vassals of the winds and waves!
He bids those vassals bear his bark along,
And well he knows they cannot bear it wrong, —
Since, waft him to whatever shore they may,
There lies the land, and there his certain prey!
—— The warriors, seated round, at every pause,
Rung on their hollow-sounding shields applause.

XV.

But louder rose the listeners' wild acclaim,
When turned the song to Guthrum's noble name,

And told how he—their sea-king bold and stern—
At Croyland Abbey, as at Lindisfarne,
Assisted by his numerous compeers,
Had sung the wondering monks the mass of spears!
How service, with the dawn of day begun,
Had ended long before the mid-day sun;
And how the holy brethren of the place,
Charmed by the Chieftain's ministry and grace,
Into his open hand the sacred hoard,
The precious treasures of the shrine had poured!
— The warriors, seated round, at every pause,
Rung on their hollow-sounding shields applause.

XVI.

'Twas sung how, leading thence his victor host,
Guthrum at length had reached the southern coast,
And come where, under Alfred's Saxon blade,
The force of England stood for fight arrayed.
How he had met them; how, on meeting, rose
The stirring music of encountering foes—
Music more sweet, more dear, to warrior's heart,
Than Maiden's voice, or Minstrel's tuneful art!

How he had left (that stirring music ceased)
For dogs, for vultures, and for wolves a feast;
And how, upon that greatest of his fields,
'Mid shouting warriors, and 'mid clashing shields,
His chiefs had round their Leader formed a ring,
And hailed him England's Conqueror and King!
—— The warriors, seated round, at every pause,
Rung on their hollow-sounding shields applause.

XVII.

Then, with the bard's accustomed tact and skill,
Who knows to change his flatteries at will,
The Minstrel added: "While, without a peer,
The valiant Guthrum ran this bright career,
Where, where was AYMUND? He, in every field,
The first to combat, and the last to yield!"
He paused. The harp of Anlave loudly rung,
And thus that scald his ready answer sung:
"I dreamed a solemn dream! In Woden's hall
Methought I stood, among his warriors all!
All stood in ordered ranks, and all stood dumb,
As if they waited great event to come!

Th' immortal damsels who on heroes tend,
Had heaped the glittering boards from end to end
With store of richest viands. On his throne
The god—majestic Woden—sat alone.
After a space, 'What King,' aloud he cried,
'Expect ye in Valhalla's mansion wide?'
One answered him: 'Brave Aymund comes—the Dane.'
'Then,' said the god, 'ye wait for him in vain.
That hero still survives, and long will be
A faithful Champion of my creed and me.
A hundred warriors yet, in fight, shall feel
The deadly point of Aymund's conquering steel!'
— The warriors, seated round, at every pause,
Rung on their hollow-sounding shields applause.

XVIII.

And now, in turn, the Saxon Minstrel rose—
A man of age he seemed, a man of woes;
But soon as e'er his magic harp struck he,
Age turned to youth, and woe itself to glee!
At least, as Guthrum whispered, such his wont;
But Thought sat now upon the Old Man's front—

Deep Thought and Sadness. Ere a note he sung,
His simple harp the Minstrel softly rung,
Then wakened, as a prelude, low yet strong,
A something hovering between speech and song.
“ With Saxon bard, alas! it fareth ill,
Who claims,” he said, “ to love his Country still.
He wears—instead of Freedom’s radiance—now
The brand of serfdom on his burning brow!
His Country’s brave Defenders ceased to live,
His Country’s King a houseless fugitive,
While o’er that King’s despoiled and waste domain
Soars the dark Raven of the victor Dane!
Such bard, when placed among his Country’s foes,
Must veil *her* wrongs, and must suppress *his* woes,
Each patriot thought must stifle as a crime,
And frame a prudent lay to suit the time.
Yet Guthrum hath a noble soul, and can,
I trust, forgive a Minstrel and a Man,
Who fain would make an effort to prolong
The high conceit of Anlave’s northern song,
But fears to wake, ’mid foes and weapons sharp,
The daring strain that hovers round his harp.”

XIX.

“ I swear by Woden ! ” Guthrum loudly cried,
“ That, Minstrel, nought of harm shall thee betide,
Sing what thou wilt ! Nay, farther—if thy song
Be worthy—even though our name it wrong,
By my good steel, and Denmark’s Raven Black,
I swear that fitting meed thou shalt not lack ! ”
By these frank words the bard emboldened seemed,
And sung : “ I, too, a solemn dream have dreamed !
I stood, like Anlave, in high Woden’s hall ;
Like Anlave, I beheld the warriors all ;
The awful silence of the vast abode
I felt, like him, and saw the martial god !
—— Suddenly came a flying Female Form,
She came, as sometimes comes a summer storm,
When winds are brisk, when slender trees are bowed,
And rainbow-fragments tinge the moving cloud !
E’en so her coming stirred, enlivened all.
Half flew, half walked she through the spacious hall,
And fronted Woden’s throne. The warrior-train,
In her, knew one of those that choose the slain !

‘ I come,’ the Damsel cried, ‘ from yonder Isle,
I come from battle, and from burning pile.
Blood flowed like water. Noble Aymund there,
For breath was gasping in the smoky air.
His blade, beside him, dripped with Saxon gore.
Him I had chosen for mine own before ;
And, flying where the hero bleeding lay,
I swiftly stooped to bear his soul away.
Alas, I found before me there, that hour,
Th’ unwelcome Spirit of a MIGHTIER POWER !’

XX.

‘ Ha ! Mightier Power !’ the startled god exclaimed,
‘ Then it was not brave Aymund that you named ?
He is *my* son ! Trained up to shed men’s blood,
Since he was boy he hath in battle stood !’
‘ Ay—so the Spirit said to me,’ again
Took up the word the Chooser of the Slain,
‘ But now his part, she said, that warrior brave
Shall learn, is not to slay mankind, but save !
The sense of Beauty, and the power of Love,
Sublimed in him, and hallowed from above,

Shall touch the hero's heart with feeling strange,
Shall touch, shall soften, and at last shall change !
That matchless valour which 'gainst others burned,
Shall 'gainst himself be resolutely turned,
In his own bosom to destroy a foe
Stouter than e'er he quelled by weapon-blow !
And that once vanquished, his, thenceforth, shall be
A higher and a nobler destiny !
Blest shall he be in hall, and blest in bower,
Blest in his love, his offspring, and his power !
A land, made happy by his peaceful sway,
To him through life shall willing homage pay ;
And to his soul shall, after death, be given
The endless rapture of the Christian Heaven !'
The Damsel ceased. On Woden fell a cloud ;
A deepening shadow dimmed each visage proud ;
Through the vast hall a flash of lightning broke ;
And thunder, following, startled me, and woke."
—He paused, but warriors, at the Minstrel's pause,
Rung not on hollow-sounding shields applause.

XXI.

You guess, my son, of all the listening throng,
I understood the most of that strange song.
But what was evident to me alone,
How came it to the Saxon Minstrel known?
Had he indeed, as bard, the gifted eye,
Before whose sight both Past and Future lie?
I doubted not. How, otherwise, could he
Have any knowledge of my fate or me?
I called him to my side, that I might say
Such courteous word as Chieftain, praised, must pay
For courteous song. I bade the Minstrel take
A valued ring, and wear it for my sake;
Hinting the while, but in an under tone,
That it were wise to quit the camp anon.
He stole away, and well it was for him!
For lowered had many a visage, darkly grim,
Upon the bard. I could but smile at those—
The scalds—whom rivalry had made his foes,
And whose vain jealousy itself expressed
In gibe malicious, and in taunting jest.

“ ’Tis plain,” said Anlave, “ that the man hath quaffed
The pure, the genuine, bard-creating draught.”
“ Oh, doubtless,” Rolfe replied, “ the thing’s of course ;
But then—— ’twere best say nothing of the source !”
But graver character the warriors’ ire
Took ’gainst the Master of the Saxon Lyre :
“ The wretch,” they deeply swore, “ deserves to bleed,
For doing insult to our Country’s creed !”
Even on me their gloomy looks they bent,
And muttered, audibly, their discontent,
That Danish bounty should a meed supply
To vagrant Nazarene—perchance a Spy !

XXII.

Their wrath which, if its object had not flown,
Might into outrage instantly have grown,
Died by degrees away—the bard withdrawn—
When through the canvas gleamed the summer dawn !
To sleep’s demands the revellers ’gan to yield,
Each taking for a couch his own broad shield,
Where he had sat. Now reigned but stillness o’er
The scene, where wildest mirth had reigned before.

But soon, above their slumbers, from without,
Broke other sound than song or wassail shout—
Each startled warrior caught the loud alarms,
And, half-awakened, grasped his ready arms!

END OF CANTO V.

GUTHRUM THE DANE.

CANTO VI.

I.

He may of battles well discourse, my son,
Who hath beheld a hundred lost and won ;
And who, through fields where warring thousands bled,
Hath often charged—retreated—rallied—led.
But that which roused the slumbering camp to strife,
Was more a struggle stern for death or life,
By men surprised in sleep, and unprepared,
Who bravely fought, yet while they fought, despaired,
Than ordered field which practised Leaders like
To gaze upon—before a blow they strike ;
Where marshalled rank to rank their fronts oppose,
And all is dreadful beauty—till they close !

II.

The instant that the warlike summons rung,
That instant Guthrum to his feet upsprung;
Upsprung his valiant Chiefs, and hurried thence,
Each to secure his several post's defence.
My earliest thought was faithful Eric—he
Who had imperilled everything for me;
Nor was my other, younger friend forgot—
I looked around for both, but saw them not.
No time it was to question whither gone !
In haste I rose, and did my armour on,
And joining Guthrum's side—my ancient wont—
Rushed forth with him to meet the battle's brunt.
We met, instead, our men recoiling back
From the foe's first, and not least fierce attack,
Which, with the utmost skill and vigour joint,
Had been directed 'gainst our weakest point.
By threat, by gesture, there compelled to halt,
We led the fugitives to fresh assault,
Repulsed, in turn, the coming Saxon might,
Rolled back the entering current of their fight,

Cleared our own trench betimes, at point of blade,
And manned the breach which there the foe had made!

III.

Then first I saw the wildly-moving field—
The marshalled foe by hundreds stood revealed;
On many a burnished helm and bright steel blade,
The brilliant beams of early morning played.
On their broad banner, which I saw advance,
The Charger White of Wessex seemed to prance—
A symbol that to every eye made plain
The Saxon Alfred was in arms again!
“I did not think,” the valiant Guthrum cried,
As with stern glance the coming Steed he eyed,
“When he so swiftly fled, yon burning noon,
That we should meet again—at least so soon!
Aymund, be firm! For see, with greatest force,
The Saxons this way bear their heavy Horse!
Now mark me—ere this day-light fair hath ceased,
My Raven on their Charger’s flesh shall feast!”

IV.

Wave after wave, the surging war came on;
Wave after wave dashed fiercely—and was gone !
For we were rocks, our sea-beat stance that held,
And each successive wave—unmoved—repelled.
Yet firmest rocks that many a storm outbrave,
In lapse of time must fall before the wave ;
And mortal nerves, whatever be their strength,
If pressed continuously, must fail at length.
Scarce could our arms the heavy falchion wield,
And scarce, before us, bear the heavy shield,
Yet still fresh numbers, vigorous as the first,
Against our frail and sinking barrier burst.
The trench, besides, that void erewhile had lain,
Now filled and heaped with bodies of the slain,
Supplied our foemen with a ghastly bridge,
And readier access to the earthen ridge
On which we fought. Our band, perforce, gave way,
And in they rushed with more than torrent sway !

V.

I tell, my son, but what I saw and shared—
I wot not how the other Leaders fared;
Wot not who yielded, who maintained his post;
I only know the day, by us, was lost!
I only know that, save for prisoners ta'en,
The Danish Camp contained no living Dane!
And that brave Guthrum and myself, of those,
Had now, alas, become the prize of foes!
Me they at once disarmed, and would have slain;
But one exclaimed: "Hold! hold! It is the Dane
Who 'scaped from us in yon wild moonlight scene:
Better for him if there he still had been,
Than reckoning with our victor King to-day!"
The captors laughed, and dragged us thence away;
Nor stayed their steps, until, in Guthrum's tent,
Before the Saxon King they lowly bent.
For—mournful change to come from one defeat!—
Their King now sat in Guthrum's honoured seat;
And Guthrum stood, his final doom to hear,
Where he had lately stood—and none his peer!

VI.

I said, before the Saxon King they bent.
I dreamed not, Harold, of the base descent!
Proud as if still I led an army's van,
I scorned to bend the knee to mortal man;
And though in regal presence, hardly saw
The Prince to whom my captors knelt in awe.
Contemning my own fate, aside I looked
To see how *his* the noble Guthrum brooked—
His soul was strung up to the highest tone;
His glance was free and fearless as my own!
And had the Monarch given, that moment, breath
To one brief word, and that brief word been—Death—
He would have marked, my son, no terror-sign
Either on Guthrum's visage, or on mine.
Brothers in many a former field of strife,
And more than brothers now in parting life,
Fixing on Alfred stern and scornful eye,
Both would have died—as heroes ever die!
While glanced across my spirit some such thought,
My stern and scornful eye the Monarch sought:

But scarce I gave to my own sight belief—
I saw—I saw—the young Northumbrian Chief !
And the same instant I perceived, my son,
The Saxon Monarch and that Chief were one !

VII.

The sullen mood, the dark and savage pride,
Which had all form of reverence denied,
At once gave way. Respect, esteem sincere,
And certain recollections, did what fear
Could never have achieved. I flew to bend
Before my Victor, and to hail him *friend*;
Though I had reason, as you now must know,
For doubting if I still should find him so.
But Alfred saw, and, instant, from his seat
Started—as if an honoured guest to greet !
My act of cordial homage stayed, and took
My hand with warmest grasp, and kindest look !
“ I thank my God ! ” with emphasis he said,
“ That thou, my friend ! hast ’scaped the Saxon blade ;
And that brave Guthrum—this, I know, is he !
Survives it too, my other friend to be !

All we of late discoursed of—I and thou—
The righteous Hand of Heaven hath altered now ;
Hath left me free a Monarch's power to use,
Gently or sternly, as myself may choose ;
And, doubtless, thy escape's implied distrust,
Or worse, might seem to render sternness just.
But spoken word, whatever may befall,
A King of England never must recall !
Vanquished, to thee I offer made, and will,
As Victor, trust me, every part fulfil,
On the conditions which we named.—Meantime,
Not to arrest pursuit, were deepest crime !
Ho ! Kenric, Cerdic ! haste ye both away !
A white flag in the sight of all display !
And let the heralds, in our royal name,
A truce, an instantaneous truce, proclaim ! ”

VIII.

Obedient to the Saxon King's behest,
Had scarcely parted the brave Chiefs addressed,
When tent-ward came a crowd with clamorous din,
Who roughly dragged two other captives in ;

In whose sad looks, as soon as turned to view,
I recognised my rescuers kind and true.
—Stern charge at once the King on Eric laid,
Of kindness much abused, and trust betrayed ;
Attributed to him the damning guilt
Of half the blood in that red morning spilt ;
And uttered high command, in the same breath,
To lead the caitiffs out to instant death !
The elder warrior, who had hung his head
Submissively, now raised it up, and said :
“ Thou art all good ; a deep offender I ;
I merit death, it seems ; and I can die.
But hear, my King, a wretch's latest prayer—
Spare this poor Youth ! the young and guiltless spare !
Still to my child a kind Protector be,
And I will gladly perish—blessing thee ! ”
The King was not unmoved, yet still his hand,
Extended, seemed to indicate command ;
And still their forms the savage captors bent,
In act to force them from the royal tent.

IX.

I interposed : " Brave Prince," I humbly said,
" Thou hast, in me, excused the acting *head* ;
And having kindly pardoned that which planned,
Mayst well forgive the purely passive *hand*.
Go, search thine army, and, from rear to van,
Thou shalt not find, believe, a truer man
Than this same Eric ! 'Twas his Danish blood
That for a moment checked his loyal mood.
And Hengist, I have ample proof to show,
Holds every foeman of his Prince his foe.
Forgive them ! " " No, brave Dane, it may not be ! "
" Yet hear me—yield the traitors up to me !
To take the Old Man from his Monarch's sight,
Will not by him be deemed a penance light ;
And for the Youth, I know a simple spell
Wherewith to fix that Youth's allegiance well ! "
" Then deepest treachery were a virtue made ;
But be it so," the King, relenting, said.
At this old Eric threw him on the ground,
And, clasping good King Alfred's knees around,

With tears of joy the Monarch's feet bedewed,
Erect the while, the youthful Hengist stood—
“ I have but little skill to plead or 'plain,”
The Stripling said, “ but bring the bravest Dane
Before my falchion—or the slanderer bring,
Who dares to call me traitor to my King,
And he, in combat, who beholds me flinch,
Like vilest snake shall scotch me—inch by inch ! ”
A murmur of suppressed applause went round,
Nor royal Alfred at the blunt speech frowned.

X.

The noble Chiefs, on peaceful mission sent,
By this time had returned into the tent,
And now they made report, that, near and far,
The hot pursuit was checked, and stayed the war.
Here stood the Saxon's victor ranks, they said,
Impatient all to find revenge delayed ;
While there, recovering heart, the routed Dane
Was mustering fast his broken bands again ;
And, undismayed by recent overthrow,
Was ready to inflict, or take, a blow.

In sooth, so high appeared their mutual rage,
'Twas feared the armies yet might re-engage!
The Monarch heard the risk; he heard appalled;
And quickly to his standard-bearer called:
"Ho, forth with us!" And forth, with hasty stride,
Across the field, where war had raged, we hied,
Until we reached the narrow strip of green
That stretched the dark and scowling ranks between.
"Here," cried the Monarch, "full in every eye,
The Saxon banner let us raise on high;
And, high beside it, give the flag to wave,
Dear to each Dane, the flag of Guthrum brave!"
'Twas done—and fairly floated into light
The Raven Black beside the Charger White!
Th' exulting Danes the signal's import knew,
And loudly shouted as the banners flew.
With fainter cheer the less-pleased Saxons hailed
The sign that peace and amity prevailed.

XI.

The generous Monarch then, with air benign,
Took in his own brave Guthrum's hand and mine,

And pledged us solemnly his kingly troth,
His word confirming by a needless oath—
That fair Northumberland should us obey,
Nor e'en the Humber bound the Danish sway ;
For thence to Thames, along the eastern coast,
Dominion wide should noble Guthrum boast.
Upon the other part, we gladly swore—
At first on ring and bracelet vowed to Thor ;
And then on holy relics, shrinèd bones,
That had, they said, been the Apostle John's,—
To hold of him the Kingdoms he had named ;
To rule them by the laws himself had framed ;
Embrace the Christian faith ; essay to win
Our warlike followers from their rites of sin ;
And, lastly, guard the Isle, now common made,
From every power that would its shores invade.
These were the terms on which we rule obtained,
And these the heralds to the hosts explained.
Nor was it long ere, o'er the glittering fields,
Rung wide the clangour of assenting shields !

XII.

No more of battle and of blood, my boy !
Thenceforward, all was triumph, all was joy !
Men that had lately mixed in deadly fray,
Were seen commingling now in friendly play.
Guthrum, who in his secret soul despised
Both creeds alike, was soon, with pomp, baptised,—
The King himself, beyond his royal wont,
Responding for him at the sacred font ;
And, daily walking in his garment white,
Full grimly, Harold, looked the Neophyte !
For me, I waved the wished immersion then,
Reserving for that holy rite the Glen,
And hinted my desire that all the Danes
Who pleased, should cleanse them of their moral stains
In the same pure Northumbrian stream with me.
“ It shall be so ! and more—Ourself will see
The rite performed,” the generous Monarch said,
And instant order for the voyage made.
Nor rolled there many summer suns away,
Ere—flying all with flags and streamers gay,

And followed by the city-crowd's acclaims—
Two stately fleets were sailing down the Thames,
Whose gallant Leader waved her canvas wings
Proudly o'er Alfred, Guthrum, Aymund—Kings!

XIII.

As round the fair and winding shores we went,
Rose, on our right, the wood-crowned hills of Kent.
The Essex marshes chanced that morn to be
A bluely-sparkling, spacious, inland sea—
For as the tides their daily changes make,
Those grounds are sometimes land, and sometimes lake.
King Alfred praised the glorious scene, and I
Withheld no term of fitting eulogy,
But said: "No lands in lovely England shown,
Can match the region which is now my own—
The varied land that fronts the eastern waves,
The land of mountains, and"——"Why not, of *caves*?"
The Monarch slyly interposed, and laughed.
Then added, gravely: "Not all Eric's craft,
And not the deepest cave in northern glen,
Could from my search have 'vailed to hide thee then,

Had other cares my longer stay allowed !
—— I told thee, Aymund, by defeat unbowed,
How willingly my faithful people all
Would arm and muster at their Monarch's call.
I had e'en then—and by a surer scout
Than thy friend, Eric, proved—sent summons out ;
And well I knew that, met on Selwood-lea,
My friends, in arms, already waited me.
That thou shouldst see their numbers, and thence know
They were no feeble, despicable foe,
And so report them—*this* I did intend
Ere thou to Guthrum's Danish camp shouldst wend.
But this thy fond escape was found to mar,
And I had left me no resource but war."

XIV.

" But why conceal thy rank ?" " A whim—perchance,
The more," he said, " thy wonder to enhance,
When thou shouldst find, no doubt to thy relief,
The English Monarch in the nameless Chief,
Prompt to fulfil his word.—My friends I found
In arms assembled on th' appointed ground,

And burning to be led to war. For me,
I had designed a previous scrutiny,
That I might learn how you in Camp were laid,
And how, and where, attack might best be made.
I changed my wonted garb, a harp prepared,
And as a wandering Minstrel forth I fared;
With ease, admittance to your Camp obtained,
And e'en the royal tent of Guthrum gained.
Nay, thou thyself didst praise my minstrel-skill,
And *pay* it—which is something better still!
Look here! nor need'st thou greatly blame thine eyes;
They saw me, Aymund, under *some disguise!*"
I looked, and lo! my own, my well-known ring
Gleamed on the finger of the smiling King—
The very same which, as his song's reward,
I had presented to the seeming Bard!
The eye of Guthrum flashed. "By mighty Thor,
And mighty Woden!" it was thus he swore—
Unmindful, or perhaps oblivious, now,
Of his late Christian rite and solemn vow—
"If I had known thee! Past, alas, is past,—
But that achievement should have been thy last!"

The Monarch smiled the honest truth to hear,
Rough from a heart that never knew a fear.

XV.

Didst ever mark, in early summer, when
The mist, at dawn, had filled some mountain glen,
And, standing on its verge of dewy heath,
You could but dimly see what lay beneath,—
How soon, when Morning had begun to stream,
Melted the mist before the warming beam,
And gave the glen, with all its varied bloom,
Its depth of woodbine, and its sides of broom,
With its long rivulet's links of rosy light,
As if by magic, to thy wondering sight?
E'en so the words of Alfred rolled away
The veil of mystery from his minstrel-lay!
Its inspiration's source, erewhile concealed.
In sudden sunshine lay at once revealed;
And judge, my son, with what a thirsty ear
I drank disclosures—new—unhoped—and dear!

XVI.

“Aymund!” said Alfred, “When, at Lindisfarne,
It was my hap thy princely rank to learn,
Thy life, or ransom, was at first with me
A cold affair of pelf or policy.
But warmer feelings soon replaced the cold,
When that poor Maiden innocently told—
The Maiden, Bertha, whom my SISTER chose
To be the sole companion of her woes,
Resigning without one regretful sigh
The proud attendance of a time gone by!—
When Bertha told in what way ran the stream
Of fancy, during thy delirious dream,
And when, by certain words that chanced to slip,
In private converse, from my sister’s lip,
I found, with some surprise, that in her heart
Her bold Deliverer held an honoured part.
For Woman’s gratitude, my friend, will move,
Ere well herself perceives it, into love,
And sometimes all too quickly for control—
Yet is ROWENA not infirm of soul;

And wert thou now to sue as Heathen Dane,
Believe me, Aymund, thou wouldst sue in vain.
But she will welcome, with a calm delight,
Her Lover—coming as a Christian Knight ! ”

XVII.

Here the King left me, for my heart, he knew,
Required some time its transports to subdue,
And then, returning, said: “ Thy realm’s affairs,
Henceforward, ask—demand thy gravest cares.
Look—now thou hast ‘ regained thy high command ’ ”—
He smiled—“ ‘ look to the lowly of thy land ! ’
The rich and great have power themselves to guard ;
The honest poor man is his Sovereign’s ward !
To him thy bounties, with free hand, dispense ;
See justice done him ; be his providence.
Yet be so from behind a prudent screen,
That makes thy goodness rather felt, than seen.
Yon Sun himself, with undiminished power,
Is ever finest in his shaded hour,
When his bright place in heaven is only known
By the fine splendours all around him thrown—

Excessive splendours which, as men behold,
Transmute the meanest clouds they touch, to gold !

XVIII.

“ From out thy Chiefs, as far as in thee lies,
For posts of power select the good and wise.
I say—and *wise*, for be it understood,
Not always wise, alas! we find the good.
But goodness, wisdom—in one soul combined—
Form ever the best Ruler of mankind.
Encourage arts—the useful still the most,
Yet never be the light and graceful lost;
These are the lovely gleams which—as they play—
Gild the dull vapours that would shade our day;
Or more—these by supernal power are given,
To tinge the else-bleak earth with hues of heaven !
And, as the highest far these arts among,
Oh, cherish most the Bard’s ennobling song—
Which to great actions gives deserved renown,
Embalms their memory, and transmits it down;
At the same time delights both soul and ear,
And makes men Patriots as they lean to hear !

XIX.

“Akin to lofty song, its source the same,
But speaking in a higher, holier name,
And with superior power—Oh, reverence thou
The Holy Faith that hath been taught thee now!
Walk by its rule thyself, and gently draw
Thy erring people to embrace its law,
Who—thus ‘made happy by thy peaceful sway,
To thee through life shall willing homage pay.’”
He smiled again, then said: “Be duly checked,
In thee, the pride of wakening Intellect,
Nor be thy reason borne along by it,
An inch beyond the scope of *what is writ*.
The virtue, Aymund, of a humble trust
Becometh beings who are made of dust.
What we are here, to us, my friend, is known;
What we shall be, belongs to GOD alone:
But safely in His care we may repose,
Who cared for us ere Earth itself arose,
Without presuming more of aught to know,
Than He, to us, hath seen it good to show.

Searching Eternity, the strongest Mind
Its perfect emblem in the Thames may find.
See! how—a current deep, and swift, and strong—
It rushes, Aymund, in its might along,
As if of power—when it at length shall gain
The foamy margin of the onward main—
To make a felt impression, far and wide,
Upon green Ocean's unresisting tide!
Alas for pride! 'Tis met by mightier force,
Met, and rolled backward on its distant source,
Compelled to re-survey each inland shore,
Which it had passed, with so much pomp, before!"

XX.

Much more the Monarch said, and I could tell;
For 'tis a mournful privilege to dwell
On these Memorials of a noble Mind,
Which shone, on earth, a Star among mankind;
But which, to earth, has long been set—to rise
With fairer beams, and shine in other skies!
Leaving an honoured name behind it here,
To his own England, and to Glory dear!

— But the chill breeze that blows from Lindisfarne,
Begins, my son, of coming night to warn;
And I, it may be, do thy patience wrong,
By tasking it with narrative so long.
A very few more words will close it now,
And then we will descend the mountain's brow.

XXI.

Fair winds and rowers stout soon brought to land
Our ships on Lindisfarne's accustomed strand,
Where the good Abbot of the Holy Isle,
On promise to rebuild his ruined Pile,
With joy agreed t' administer the rite
Of baptism to each Danish proselyte.
Then marched we forth with banner and with brand,
As if to war, across the lovely land.
Peasants, in groups, on every verdant hill,
Stood to behold us passing, mute and still,
In wonder, doubtless, why such numbers then
Should seek, in arms, the Valley of the Glen—
A peaceful vale and sweet, whose every lea
All day is rife with butterfly and bee,

As if each flower the passing summer flings
On its fair sloping banks, had taken wings!

XXII.

The summer-morning sun, as we advanced,
Full brightly on our armèd march had glanced;
The sluggish Till had brightly seen us through,
And past the base of terraced Homilheugh.
But when we reached the destined river's edge,
A sudden gloom had fall'n on bank and sedge.
Dark clouds were mirrored in the gloomy stream;
With frequent flash, the lightning 'gan to gleam;
And, following fast, the thunder's sullen sound
Was heard to mutter all the Mountains round!
I felt, myself, a fear, and thought I saw,
On many a visage round me, signs of awe.
To the good Abbot I at once confessed
The natural feeling that disturbed my breast.
"It seems," I said, "as if the Thunder-Power
I lately served, in yonder sky did lower
On his Apostate Son! as if he spoke
The wrath of an Immortal in each stroke!"

XXIII.

“ Oh, rather say,” the holy Abbot cried,
As, rapt, the dim and quaking hills he eyed,
“ Say rather that—unseen—the Heavenly Hosts
Have on these mountain-summits ta'en their posts,
And now, by turns, are uttering, from each height,
Their gratulations o'er this sacred rite,
Which brings the hundreds their glad eyes behold,
Within their glorious MASTER's ransomed Fold!
Green Howsden mutters, but the solemn tone
Is not the thunder's, and is not his own!
Nor are these rapid gleams mere lightning! nor
Mere echoes these that come from Newton Torr!
Their gladness now the Lantons loudly tell,
And hark—how loudly answers Yevering Bell!
In every flash, in every peal is given
A sign, a proof, that there is joy in Heaven! ”
He ceased. Poor Bertha's tale to me recurred,
And now was sanctioned by the good man's word;
His accents—like the thunder—seemed to roll,
His glances—like the lightning—fired my soul!

And from his lips when those brief words had flowed,
Which dedicate the future life to God,
I stooped—the Glen's pure waters o'er me ran ;
And I emerged, my son, a Christened Man !
—I need not tell thee that each warrior brave
At the same time partook the cleansing wave.

XXIV.

JESU ! at once the rolling thunder ceased ;
The clouds 'gan part, and gather towards the east ;
Out burst the sun, with brilliancy divine,
Once more on mountain and on stream to shine ;
And, while bright showers were glancing down the gale,
A gorgeous Rainbow spanned the glittering vale !
No longer gazed on as the bridge of gods,
By which Immortals reach their sky-abodes,
But now believed a holy sign to be,
The pledge of peace to men, of joy to me !
Beneath its arch of glory, darkly stood
That Castle strong, begirt with wave and wood,
Which held, I knew, the all of human birth
I longed to meet with now on God's good earth.

And lo ! from forth its portal—while the bow
Of heaven above them kept its freshest glow—
Issued a long bright train of maidens fair :
I asked not, Harold, if my Love were there—
But flew, and, kneeling, clasped, on Glen's green side,
The fair hand of my beauteous Saxon Bride !

Here ended he his Tale—that Warrior Old,
And 'twas the last time that the Tale he told ;
For soon thereafter, in his Fort of pride,
In Bamborough Castle, he fell sick and died.

He was not buried where he died, although
The dust of kings reposed, in earth, below.
Nor was he ta'en to royal York, where he
Had wielded long the power of sovereignty,

And where, in the old King's declining day,
His Son had ruled with delegated sway.
For his soul—wandering in the hour of death—
With words like these had occupied his breath :
“ To Newton's Churchyard bear my corpse away,
That when I rise at the great Judgment-day,
There will my dearest friends rise with me !—there
My own Rowena with her shining hair ;
There little Edith, whom we lost a child,
With her sweet aspect, and her ringlets wild,
So like her Mother's ; little Alfred, too,
Will wake beside me, with his eyes of blue !
There Eric, Hengist, will return to life ;
And Bertha there—reluctantly his wife,
But ever true and tender to the last ;—
All roused up by the Angel's trumpet-blast,
And all at once to consciousness restored,
Will mount the air with me, and meet the LORD ! ”
His wish they revered, wild though deemed to be,
And laid the King in Newton's cemet'ry ;
Where his rude Tomb successive races saw
With less and less of wonder, and of awe,

Until inscription, sculpture, even stone
Had disappeared, and left the spot unknown !

Forgive one lingering note ! A thousand years
From Aymund's death were ending, when—with tears—
I saw an Old Man from his home conveyed,
And in the same place reverently laid.
He was a peasant, whose long life had been
Of toil and labour one unvaried scene.
He fought no battles, save with Want. His name
No splendour had, save that of honest fame.
And when he died, no stone arose to tell
Where, after all his ills, he sleeps so well.
To me—who missed him longest, mourned him most—
Even to me, that Old Man's grave is lost,
As much is lost to all that would explore,
As His, who died a thousand years before.
Both equal now—no vestige to evince
Where lies the PEASANT, where was laid the PRINCE !

NOTES.

My Harp was made from stunted tree,
The growth of Glendale's barest lea.—*page 7.*

Glendale, one of the minor divisions of the county of Northumberland, takes its name from the small stream of the Glen. The writer passed his boyish years on its banks, which he has made a principal scene of his poem. He has never beheld anything so fine as the mountain prospect from Lanton Hill, of which a description is attempted in the beginning of Canto III.

I tuned my Harp to Order's cause,
And sung for Britain's King and Laws.—*page 10.*

The writer trusts that this will not be considered a too ostentatious allusion to a number of loyal and patriotic lyrics, which successively appeared in most of the leading journals of the day, and which, in their collected form, have gone through three editions.

I list to Thomson's nightingale.—*page 11.*

Thomson's fondness for the song of the nightingale is well known. He was in the habit of sitting at his open window half the summer night, entranced with its unrivalled music.

And muse, where Pope himself hath mused.—*page 11.*

I allude to Battersea, the lanes and walks of which must have been familiar to the great poet, from his frequent visits to the mansion of his friend, Lord Bolingbroke, at that place.

As if it promised to be wild no more.—*page 14.*

I have a dim recollection of having read, many years ago, this line, or something very like it, in a local poem of which I have forgot the name.

Her dragon's form.—page 15.

The soldiers of each fleet obeyed in general one chief, whose vessel was distinguished from the rest by some particular ornament. He could guide his vessel as the good horseman his steed, and to the ascendancy of courage and skill were added for him the influence created by superstition; he was initiated in the science of the runes; he knew the mystic characters which, engraved upon swords, secured the victory, and those which, inscribed on the poop and on the oars, preserved vessels from shipwreck.—*Thierry's Norman Conquest*.

Spell-guarded was her mast of roan-tree.—page 16.

The roan-tree, or mountain ash, was deemed an infallible charm against the power of demons. In the old Ballad of "The Laidley Worm," Childe Wynde's ship had "a mast of rowan-tree."

The Raven Black.—page 16.

The Danes, on landing, unfurled a mystic standard. It was a flag of white silk, in the centre of which appeared the black figure of a Raven, with open beak and outspread wings; three of King Swen's sisters had worked it in one night, accompanying their labour with magic songs and gestures. It was supposed to indicate, by its motions, the direction in which a successful adventure might be made.—*Thierry's Norman Conquest*.

The weapons used in war.—page 16.

Their offensive weapons were commonly the bow and arrows, the battle-axe, and the sword. Of their defensive armour, the shield or buckler was the chief. This most commonly was of wood, bark, or leather. It was generally of a long oval form, just the height of the bearer. It was not without its use even in naval encounters; for if the fear of falling into their enemies' hands obliged one of the warriors to cast himself into the sea, he could easily escape by swimming upon his buckler.—*Mallet's Northern Antiquities*.

Two Scalds with us.—page 17.

They (the poets) were more especially honoured and caressed at the courts of those princes, who distinguished themselves by their great actions and passion for glory. Such princes never set out on any considerable expedition without some of them in their train.—*Ibid*.

Bamborough Castle. Holy Isle.—*page 18.*

The venerable remains of the celebrated fortress of Bamborough Castle stand on the crown of a high rock, triangular in figure, one of the points projecting into the sea—the German Ocean. Holy Island, or more properly Lindisfarne, which is situated a few miles north of Bamborough, is called by Bede a semi-island, being twice an island and twice a continent in one day; for at the flowing of the tide, it is encompassed by water; and at the ebb, there is an almost dry passage to and from the mainland. St. Aidan was the founder of the Monastery.—*History of Northumberland.*

All escaped but one,

And he stood up beside the altar stone.—*page 21.*

The outrage here described, is not unlike what actually took place at Croyland Abbey, an account of which the reader will find in a subsequent note.

How should she comprehend thy Danish tongue.—*page 41.*

There can be no doubt that the Saxon and Danish tongues were originally similar, or the same. But when it is remembered that some four hundred years had elapsed from the time of the Saxons being settled in England, to the invasion of that country by the Danes, it will, I think, be confessed that sufficient changes would, in the interim, have taken place in both dialects to render unintelligible—or nearly so—a Dane to a Saxon, and *vice versâ*. The present dialect of Yorkshire, for instance, is essentially the same that is now spoken in the county of Northumberland; and yet so differently are the same words pronounced in those parts respectively, that a Northumbrian has considerable difficulty to understand a Yorkshireman who speaks his native *patois* in its purity.

On Glen's fair banks stands Coupland's massive Tower.

page 59.

I am not prepared to prove that Coupland Castle existed at the period of the poem, or that it ever had so illustrious an Occupant as I have imagined for it. This is a work of fiction, and, with the exception of two or three leading points, pretends not to historical accuracy.

The Glen.—page 59.

Paulinus coming with the king and queen into a manor or house of the king's, called Ad-Gebrin, now Yevering, abode with them thirty-six days, employed wholly in catechising and baptising; during which time he did nothing from morning to evening but instruct the people in the saving word of Christ; and being thus instructed, he baptised them to the forgiveness of their sins, in the river Glen, which was hard by.—*History of Northumberland.*

The mountain-fern.—page 60.

This tradition respecting the fern is still current among the peasantry of the district in which the scene is laid. I have often, when a boy, cut the fern-root, and have as often succeeded in convincing myself that I saw the initials I. C. clearly defined in its veins and shadings. The impression of a fern on the shoulder of the ass, is a fact equally accredited.

Almighty Woden.—page 62.

Odin, or Woden, was the chief god of the Scandinavians. His palace was Valhalla, where he rewarded all such as died sword in hand. The rewards are described in the text. "There remain to this day," says Mallet, "some traces of the worship paid to Woden in the name given by almost all the people of the north to the fourth day of the week, which was formerly consecrated to him. It is called by a name which signifies Woden's day." To which I add that the Northumbrian peasantry of the present time, probably pronounce the name of the day in precisely the same manner as did their ancestors in the times of paganism. They call it *Wadensday*—sounding the *a* in the first syllable as in *father*.

The spell of God.—page 63.

Dr. Adam Clark derives the word *gospel* from two Saxon words, *God* and *spell*—i. e. God's spell, or charm.

Go, ask the hapless wretch, convulsed with pain.—page 78.

In this passage, as in two or three others, some of my readers will recognise resemblances to passages in former publications of mine. On which I beg leave to remark that nearly all my previous poetical attempts were *preparatory* to my present; and that these passages are now in their proper place.

The bolder bison.—page 86.

The Wild Cattle still found in the parks of Chillingham and Gisburn, are probably the only remains of the true and genuine breed of that species of cattle, and answer, says Mackenzie in his History of Northumberland, in every particular, the description given by Boethius of these animals.

The humble classes and the high.—page 90.

It is not Fortune, it is Nature, that has made the essential differences between Men; and whatever appellation a small number of persons who speak without sufficient reflection, may affix to the general body of their fellow-creatures, the whole difference between the Statesman, and many a Man from among what they call the dregs of the people, often lies in the rough outside of the latter.—*De Lolme on the Constitution of England*.

Craven's pastoral mountains.—page 99.

The beautiful and romantic district of Craven, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, deserves a poet and a poem to itself. Whenside, mentioned in the next page, is the highest of its mountains; and the dale of the Wharfe one of the wildest and most beautiful of its glens. The latter is overlooked, on the south, by Kilnsay Crag—a huge rock of limestone, that arrests and fixes the eye of every traveller.

Gordale—page 102.

This place, the description of which I have feebly attempted, is, says Dr. Whitaker, “a solid mass of limestone, cleft asunder by some great convulsion of nature, and opening its ‘ponderous and marble jaws’ on the right and left. The sensation of horror on approaching it, is increased by the projection of either side from its base, so that the two connivent rocks, though considerably distant at the bottom, admit only a narrow line of day-light from above. At the very entrance you turn a little to the right, and are struck by a yawning mouth in the face of the opposite crag, whence the torrent, pent up beyond, suddenly forced a passage within the memory of man, which, at every swell, continues to spout out one of the boldest and most beautiful cataracts that can be conceived.” “I am well aware,” he adds, “how imperfect the foregoing account will be thought by every one who has

formed his ideas on the spot. It must, however, be remembered that the pencil, as well as the pen, has hitherto failed in representing this astonishing scene."—*History of Craven*.

Gennet's Cave and Waterfall.—page 109.

These, sufficiently described in the text, may be found by the curious, a few hundred yards from Gordale.

Guthrum's Tent.—page 117.

The Chief was King only on the sea and in the battle field; for in the hour of the banquet the whole troop sat in a circle, and the horns, filled with beer, passed from hand to hand, without any distinction of first man or last.—*Thierry's Norman Conquest*.

I worship, like my warlike sires, therefor,
The honoured names of Woden and of Thor.
Though, to confess the truth, &c.—page 120.

Superstition did not blind all the ancient Scandinavians without exception. There were among them men wise enough to discover the folly of the received opinions, and courageous enough to condemn them without reserve. In the history of Olaf Tryggvason, a warrior fears not to say publicly, that he relies more on his own strength and on his arms, than upon Thor or Odin.—*Mallet's Northern Antiquities*.

The sea-king.—page 122.

The sea-king was every where faithfully followed and zealously obeyed, because he was always renowned as the bravest of the brave, as one who had never slept under a smoke-dried roof, who had never emptied a cup in a chimney-corner.—*Ibid*.

At Croyland Abbey, as at Lindisfarne.—page 123.

All the able-bodied men of the community, to the number of thirty, departed, and having loaded a boat with the relics, sacred vases, and other valuables, took refuge in the neighbouring marshes. There remained in the choir only an abbot, a few infirm old men, two of whom were upwards of a hundred years old, and some children, whom their parents, according to the devotional custom of the period, were bringing up in the monastic habit. They continued to chant psalms at all the regular hours; when that of the mass arrived, the abbot placed himself at the altar in his sacerdotal robes. All present

received the communion, and almost at the same moment the Danes entered the church. The chief who marched at their head killed with his own hand the abbot at the foot of the altar, and the soldiers seized the monks, young and old, whom terror had dispersed. * * * As the prior fell dead, one of the children, ten years of age, who was greatly attached to him, fell on the body weeping, and asking to die with him. His voice and face struck one of the Danish chiefs; moved with pity, he drew the child out of the crowd, and taking off his frock, and throwing over him a Danish cassock, said: "Come with me, and quit not my side for a moment." He thus saved him from the massacre, but no others were spared.—*The Norman Conquest*.

I dreamed a solemn dream.—page 124.

The song which Anlave is here represented as singing, was suggested to me by a genuine Danish lyric, thus given by Thierry.

"I dreamt a dream. Methought I was at day-break in the hall of Walhalla, preparing all things for the reception of the men killed in battles.

"I awakened the heroes from their sleep; I asked them to rise, to arrange the seats and the drinking-cups, as for the coming of a king.

"'What means all this noise?' cried Braghi; 'why are so many men in motion, and why all this ordering of seats?'

"'It is because Erik is on his way to join us,' replied Odin, 'I await him with joy. Let some go forth to meet him.'

"'How is it that his coming pleases thee more than the coming of any other king?'

"'Because in more battle-fields has his sword been red with blood; because in more places has his ensanguined spear diffused terror.'"

The Choosers of the Slain.—page 127.

"Besides those twelve goddesses," says Mallet, "there are numerous virgins in Valhalla. Their business is to wait upon the heroes, and they are called Valkryior. Odin also employs them to choose in battles those who are to perish."—*Northern Antiquities*.

I bade the Minstrel take

A valued ring.—page 130.

They (the Scalds) were rewarded for the poems they composed in honour of the kings and heroes with magnificent presents; we never

find the Scald singing his verses at the courts of princes without being recompensed with golden rings, glittering arms, and rich apparel.—*Ibid.*

The bard-creating draught.—page 131.

The Danish fable of the origin of poetry may be briefly given here. Kvásir, a being formed by the gods, was murdered, and his blood being mixed up with honey, composed a liquor of such surpassing excellence, that whoever drinks of it acquires the gift of song. Odin, by a stratagem, succeeded in getting possession of it, and having swallowed the whole, transformed himself into an eagle, and flew off as fast as his wings could carry him. But Suttung, from whom he had stolen the liquor, also took on himself the form of an eagle, and flew after him. The gods, on seeing Odin approach, set out in the yard all the jars they could find, which Odin filled by discharging through his beak the wonder-working liquor he had drunk. He was, however, so near being caught by Suttung, that some of the liquor escaped by an impurer vent, and as no care was taken of *this*—it fell to the share of the poetasters!

The Charger White of Wessex.—page 135.

It was not long ere they saw the White Horse, the banner of Wessex, bearing down upon them. Alfred attacked their redoubts at Ethandun in the weakest point, carried them, drove out all the Danes, and, as the Saxon chronicles express it, remained master of the carnage.—*The Norman Conquest.*

That fair Northumberland should us obey,
Nor e'en the Humber bound the Danish sway.

page 145.

Alfred granted them the most liberal terms, giving up to Guthrum, their king, all the territories of East Anglia and Northumbria, to be held tributary upon the easy conditions of his evacuating all the West-Saxon dominions, and receiving baptism along with the principal chiefs of his army.—*Britton's Beauties of Wiltshire.*

At first on ring and bracelet vowed to Thor,
And then on holy relics.—page 145.

"Godrun," says Thierry, "with his captains, swore on a bracelet consecrated to their gods, that they would in all good faith receive

baptism." And Asser, in his *Life of Alfred*, says: "Also they swore an oath over the Christian relics, which with King Alfred were next in veneration after the Deity himself."

O'er the glittering fields

Rung wide the clangour of assenting shields.—page 145.

To strike his shield was invariably the way in which a Northman expressed his assent to any proposition.

The king, himself, beyond his royal wont,

Responding for him at the sacred font.—page 146.

King Alfred officiated as spiritual father to the Danish chief, who, putting the neophytical white robe over his armour, departed with the wreck of his army. The limits of the two populations were fixed by definitive treaty, sworn to, as its preamble set forth, by Alfred, King; Godrun, King; all the Anglo-Saxon wise men, and all the Danish people.—*The Norman Conquest*.

Those grounds are sometimes land, and sometime lake.

page 147.

The marshes of Essex, at high water, would form a magnificent scene for centuries after the death of Alfred—the embankments which prevent the Thames from overflowing them, having been constructed only about a hundred years ago.

The honest poor man is his sovereign's ward.—page 152.

The sentiments expressed in this passage, as elsewhere, are agreeable to the character and conduct of the Great Alfred, as described by Asser: "The King, eager to give up to God the half of his daily service, and more also, if his ability on the one hand and his malady on the other, would allow him, showed himself a minute investigator of the truth in all his judgments, and this especially for the sake of the poor, to whose interests, day and night, among other duties of this life, he ever was wonderfully attentive."

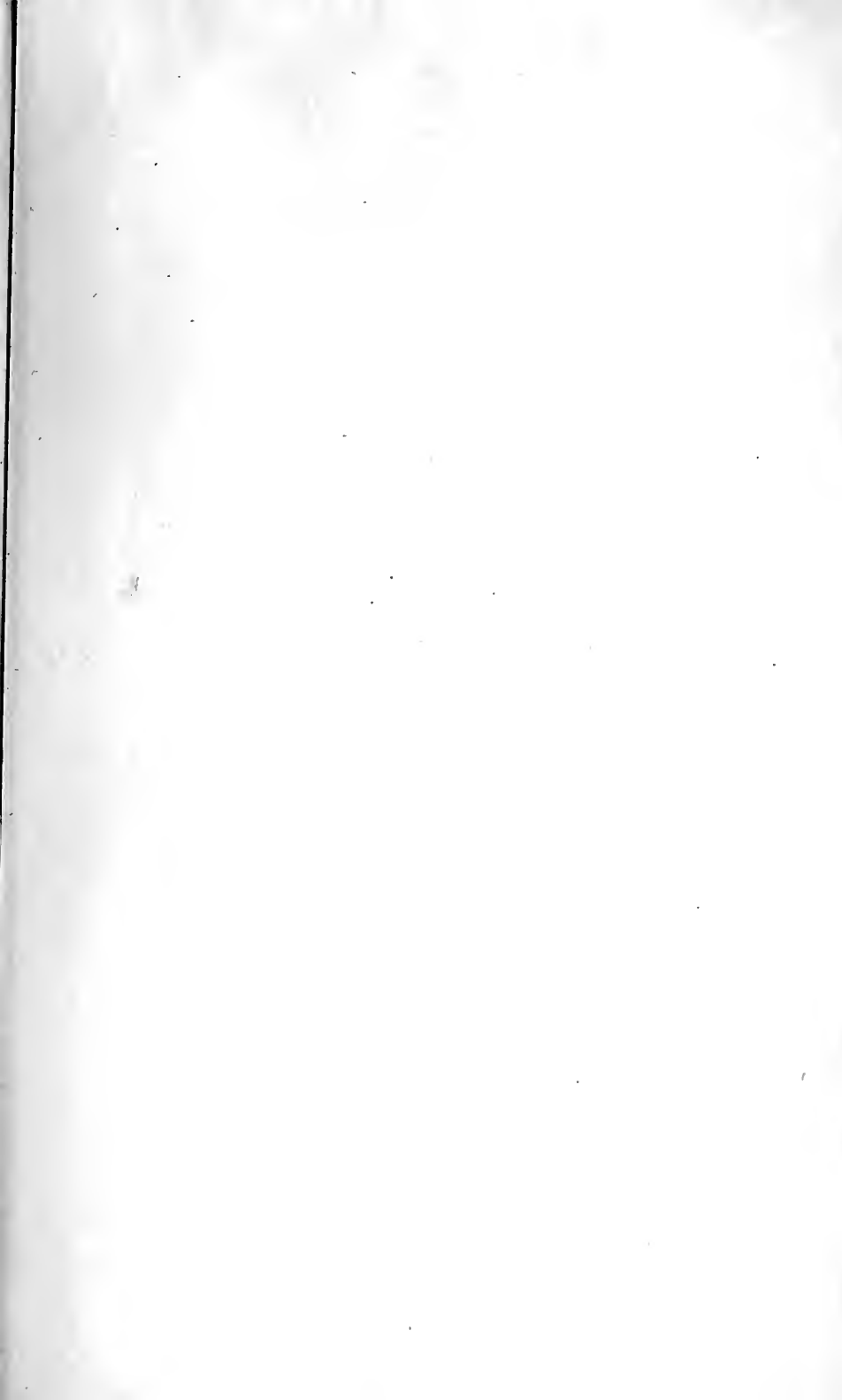
No longer gazed on as the bridge of gods.—page 159.

The gods made a bridge between heaven and earth; this bridge is the rainbow.—*Northern Antiquities*.

I saw an old man from his home conveyed,
And in the same place reverently laid.—*page 162.*

The writer's father died in 1809, and was buried in the churchyard of Kirk Newton. I may be pardoned for adding a single memorial of him. He and two brothers, when children, had been left orphans, of whom my father was the eldest, and consequently the most capable of feeling the loss they had sustained. Having been told that his father and mother had gone to Heaven, he used to steal out of an evening, and watch the first stars that appeared in the west, fondly dreaming that they might be the eyes of the Departed, gazing upon the son of their love! The thought always filled his own eyes with tears, and sent him to his parentless home and bed, to weep himself asleep!—There was poetry in that child's soul.

FINIS.



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY
Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

REC'D 10-10-60

QL OCT 01 1960
403 218 390

Form L9-100m-9,'52 (A3105) 444

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

ER Story -
1499 Luther the Dane
01973

L 006 027 092 3

AA 000 367 531 1

ER
1499
01973

